

**ANALYSIS OF TACTICAL ARTIFACTS WITHIN THE NPU
ENVIRONMENT TO HELP RESIDENTS RESIST
GENTRIFICATION**

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The Academic Faculty

by

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GENTRIFICATION**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS	viii
SUMMARY	ix
CHAPTER 1. Introduction	1
1.1 Geographical / Historical Context, Impact, and Importance	1
1.2 Civic Participation and Resistance to Displacement	5
CHAPTER 2. The Meeting Space of NPU-L	10
2.1 Methodology of Observations	10
2.2 Physical Environment Layout	19
2.2.1 On-The Rise Financial Center	19
2.2.2 Vine City Civic Association Center	23
2.3 Conduct and Flow of the NPU Meeting	26
2.4 Common Attendants and Participants	34
2.4.1 Members of the Executive Committee	35
2.4.2 City Planner or City Officials	39
2.4.3 Representatives of Corporation, Agency, or Institution	41
2.4.4 Long-Term Resident Members	43
2.5 Interview Insights and Recommendations	45
2.5.1 The History of City Planning and the NPU System	46
2.5.2 The History of Developers and NPU-L	49
2.5.3 The Importance of the Westside Land-Use Framework Plan	51
CHAPTER 3. A Focus on NPU-L Artifacts	54
3.1 Sign-In Sheet: Artifact used for Verification	54
3.2 Voting Paddles: Artifact used for Participant Communication	56
3.3 Artifacts used for Discussion	58
3.3.1 Monthly Meeting Agenda	58
3.3.2 Presentation Poster / Material	60
3.4 Whiteboard: Artifacts used for Reporting / Recording	64
CHAPTER 4. Understanding the NPU Through Design	67
4.1 Identified Areas for Design Focus	68
4.1.1 Sense-Making and Deliberation	68
4.1.2 Community Involvement and Identity	70
4.1.3 One Dialogue, Two Conversations	72
4.2 Design Scope	75
4.3 Design Prototype	79
4.4 Methodology for Testing	84

4.5	Testing of the Prototype	86
4.6	Feedback from Testing	88
4.7	Additional Feedback	90
CHAPTER 5. Future Steps for NPU-L Design Work		91
5.1	Future Design Considerations	91
5.2	Reflection	93
APPENDIX A. Quantitative Testing Results		96
REFERENCES		102

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1.1	- Median Gross Rent for Westside of Atlanta	3
Figure 1.1.2	- Map of Atlanta NPU System	5
Figure 1.2.1	- Displacement in NPU-L through Unaffordable Housing	7
Figure 2.1.2	- Sample of NPU AEIOU Organization	17
Figure 2.2.1	- NPU Environment Layouts	19
Figure 2.2.2	- ORFC NPU Meeting Layout	21
Figure 2.2.3	- VCCAC NPU Meeting Layout	24
Figure 2.3.1	- 2018 NPU Monthly Meeting Agenda	26
Figure 2.3.2	- Report by City of Atlanta Code Enforcement	28
Figure 2.3.3	- 2019 NPU Monthly Meeting Agenda	32
Figure 2.4.1	- Layout and Flow of NPU Attendant Interactions	34
Figure 2.4.2	- Meeting Facilitation by NPU 2018 Chairperson	35
Figure 2.4.3	- Parliamentarian officiating Voting Procedure	37
Figure 2.4.4	- City Planner delivering Planner's Report to NPU	39
Figure 2.4.5	- Representatives presenting development project	41
Figure 2.4.6	- Resident-Member Responses	43
Figure 2.5.1	- NPU Resource Mapping Document from 1976	46
Figure 2.5.2	- NPU 5-Year Plan Map (1979)	48
Figure 2.5.3	- Westside Land Use Framework Plan (2017)	51
Figure 3.1.1	- Sign-in Sheet for NPU-L Meetings	55
Figure 3.2.1	- Voting Paddles in Use (2018 NPU-L)	56
Figure 3.3.1	- Sign-in Sheet for NPU-L Meetings	58

Figure 3.3.2	- 3D Rendering and 2D Site Plan	60
Figure 3.4.1	- Use of the White Board in 2018 NPU Meeting	64
Figure 4.1.1	- Current State of Development (Left) and 3D Render of Future-State (Right)	68
Figure 4.2.1	- Current State of Land (Top) and 3D Render of Project Proposal (Bottom)	75
Figure 4.3.1	- NPU-L Resident Assessment Map Prototype (Full)	79
Figure 4.3.2	- Exterior (Top) and Interior (Bottom) of Prototype	81
Figure 4.4.1	- Overview of Prototype Testing Strategy	84
Figure 4.5.1	- Presentation of Prototype and Integration into NPU Meeting	86
Figure 4.6.1	- Feedback Mapped to Corresponding Feature of Prototype	88

LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AMI	Average Median Income
CBA	Community Benefits Agreement
CDP	Comprehensive Development Plan
NPU	Neighborhood Planning Unit
NPU-L	Designation for English Avenue and Vine City neighborhoods
NRAT	NPU-L Resident Assessment Tool
ORFC	On the Rise Financial Center
VCCAC	Vine Center Civic Association Center
WLFP	Westside Land Use Framework Plan

SUMMARY

Gentrification is a systematic, socio-economic development that has existed as an area of concern within the field of urban design for decades. The negative effects of this process, which leads way to an erasure of unique culture and identity, disproportionately affects low income, predominantly-minority communities in Atlanta such as the neighborhoods of English Avenue and Vine City. The creation of Atlanta's historical Neighborhood Planning Unit (NPU) system was designed to support disenfranchised communities like these through the creation of a local civic structure where neighborhoods could voice their support, or lack thereof, on local issues relating to licensing, zoning, and land-use. For English Avenue and Vine City, which make up NPU-L, an NPU meeting creates an opportunity for local residents to participate in creating collective resistance to the recent development proposed by commercial stakeholders not only seeking approval from city government but looking to use neighborhood land for the site of their construction. The aim of this thesis study is to explore and understand design's capability to effectively approach the complex, systematic issue of gentrification through the study of the NPU environment and the development of a viable, contextual design solution which could be impactful for the residents of the NPU-L environment. In determining how design can provide support for the civic discourse in this NPU environment, the design recommendations proposed from this study will ideally present more opportunity for development of design solutions in this and other communities also affected by gentrification.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The nature of gentrification is systematic; while the origin of this process often starts in financial and social institutions, it is more often observed through its tangible disruption of social and physical environments. It is important to understand how the social and economic disenfranchisement of the Westside of Atlanta has been gradual but intentional. To gain context on the how the large-scale redevelopment of Atlanta has impacted this specific set of neighborhoods, an overview will be presented on Neighborhood Planning Unit L's rich identity and why that is currently at risk of erasure.

1.1 Geographical / Historical Context, Impact, and Importance

City neighborhoods serve as organs of self-government and, on a larger-scale, the organization of these neighborhoods is responsible for helping the “inherently politically powerless” within these areas mediate with the “inherently powerful city as a whole” (Jacobs, 1992). Within Atlanta, Georgia it is the purpose of Neighborhood Planning Unit (NPU) system, as seen in Figure 1.1.2, to provide residents throughout the city this very means to make recommendations to the Mayor and city council; this citizen advisory council is able to recommend action or policy to any city agency, as well as advise the bureau of city planning, as it relates to the livability of the cities' neighborhoods (Atlanta, 2018). However, in spite of this resource, residents located on the Westside of Atlanta, specifically in the English Avenue and Vine City neighborhoods doubt that their ability to impact the development of Atlanta is enough to stay the effects of displacement (Buckner, 2018; Coleman, 2018; Green 2018). This can be tied to the current socio-economic status of the English Avenue and Vine City, where over 40 percent of residents live below the

poverty line and resident's annual household income equates to \$21,513 and \$26,148 respectively (US Census, 2013). It should be noted, in comparison, that the annual household income for the city of Atlanta is roughly double this amount at \$52,197 (US Census, 2013). However, to further place this wage in context, the national estimate for Millennial renters, which also makes up the majority of the population in both neighborhoods, is that they spend 45% of their income on housing ("Atlanta, GA Rental Market Trends", 2019; "Demographics", 2019). With more than 82% of the population being renters in both neighborhoods, this leaves a large amount of NPU-L susceptible to the rise in rent costs which has continued to outpace any increase in income throughout Atlanta (Bennet, 2018; "Demographics", 2019). As seen in Figure 1.1, for renters of NPU-L, median gross rent is anywhere from \$867 to \$902 dollars which is 60% higher than the recommended rent price for the area's annual median income (InvestAtlanta, 2018). While the involvement, or lack thereof, of a landlord can make renters extremely susceptible to unaffordable prices, the 17% of homeowners in these neighborhoods have similar difficulties with being able to resist the pressure that comes with the increasing property taxes that have skyrocket due to new, incoming development (Abdulahi, 2018).

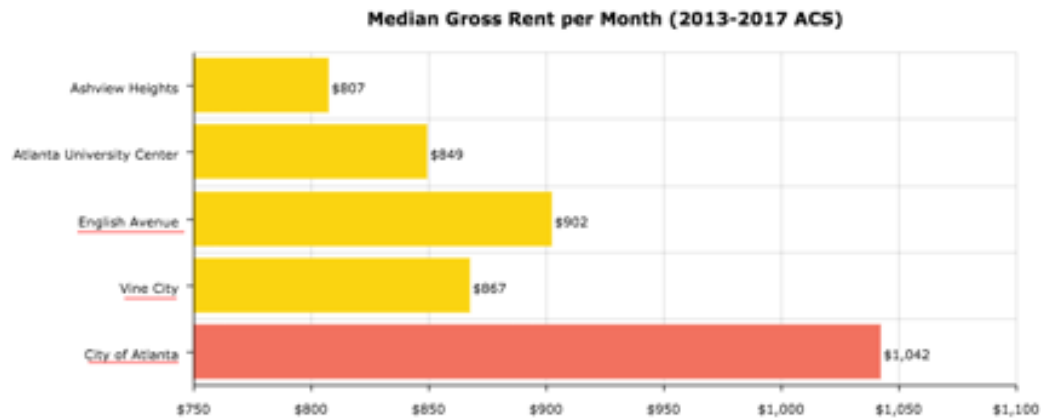


Figure 1.1.1 - Median Gross Rent for Westside of Atlanta

While the value for these big developments are often explained as long term investments for the communities' improvement, over 60% properties within English Avenue and Vine City are reported to be vacant, deteriorated, or poor in condition despite the construction of the Mercedes-Benz Stadium and the Westside expansion of The Beltline ("Demographics", 2019). Many longtime homeowners within this area, who feel that they are at threat of losing their homes due to rising costs and being targeted by real estate investors who are willing to offer them large sums of money to sell, have been located within this area long enough to recall what earns it the title of Atlanta's "Historic Westside" (Powers, 2017; Abdulahi, 2018). In fact, the inception of the Neighborhood Planning Unit serves as an important artifact from the historic moments of Vine City and English Avenue. Maynard Jackson, the first black mayor of Atlanta, established this system in 1974 as a means to help support citizens who had been historically disenfranchised within the city in an effort to ensure that neighborhoods would be able to provide pertinent commentary and active involvement on planning the structure of their communities (Atlanta, 2018). These neighborhood planning units (NPU) would allow for residents to

come together once a month to provide approval or denial for applications relating to rezoning, liquor licenses, festivals, parades, and land-use within their area. To accommodate the large geographic area of Atlanta, the city was broken into 25 NPUs which are given the autonomy to determine their bylaws and additional rules for representation and governance. As a result, NPUs across the city have different configurations, locations, and focuses as they attempt to meet their constituents interest. However, there are a few details that are consistent to most NPU: (1) the NPU serve as a focal point for a conglomerate of adjacent neighborhoods assigned under that planning unit, (2) The NPU serves as an important access point for residents, business owners, promoters and developers, (3) officials elected to the NPU governing body are serving as volunteers with no compensation or reimbursement for supplies on behalf of the City government and (3) the NPU is able to amplify the determination of residents and neighborhood associations within its jurisdiction as well provide accountability for the area it governs and the City government that presides over it. Applications submitted to the City government, which impact land-use and zoning, are disseminated to the NPU through a designated city planner whose responsibility to the neighborhood body is to help record official voting, present and provide clarity on items that are sent by the City government, as well as act as a liaison for residents to understand how their democratic operations factor into the larger deliberation done by the City of Atlanta government. For an area like NPU-L, which has been historically known for its predominantly black demographic (over 96% of residents within either community have identified as African American), the original intent of the NPU system seems to remain intact as a tool for involvement by residents who feel

disenfranchised and are seeking intercession from unwarranted changes in their local environment.

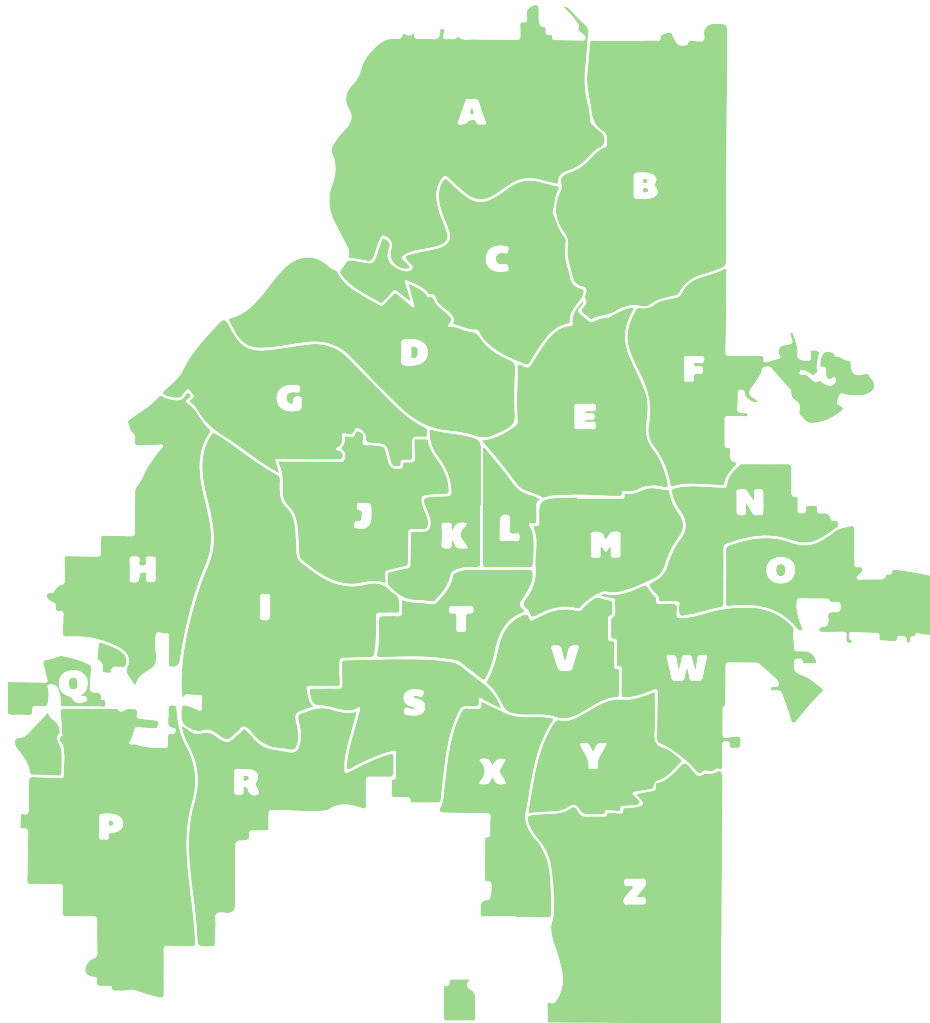


Figure 1.1.2 - Map of Atlanta NPU System

1.2 Civic Participation and Resistance to Displacement

While there are some instances where the protest of Westside residents through the NPU process have received some acknowledgement from Atlanta City Council, many

residents within the Westside of Atlanta look for additional means to protest the unwanted changes in their communities. While the presence of physical and fiscal neglect can be observed based on the poverty in these areas, many residents continue to look for concrete evidence that the new influx of real-estate development will support the preservation of their neighborhoods instead of erase them (Green, 2018; Keenan, 2018). This concern is substantiated by the in-depth analyses that has been conducted to understand the negative, systematic effects that gentrification has on urban communities – communities that have been already impacted within Atlanta and those additional areas which have been effected across a national and global scale (Russell, 2009; Botti, 2013; Gordach, et al, 2017; “Housing Justice League and Research Action Cooperative”, 2017). Research has used these prior studies of gentrification to note that the Westside neighborhoods, which form NPU-L, are not only susceptible due to the incoming economic impact of large developments, like the Mercedes-Benz Stadium and construction of Atlanta Beltline Transportation system, but also due to sporting events like Super Bowl LIII; the infrastructure needed to construct and support new large-scale development often draws on the local economy for support but in-turn does not inherently reciprocate this support to the current neighborhood infrastructure nor the livelihood of the residents that inhabit it (Hambrick, 2016; Coleman, 2018; Morris Realtor Partners, 2018; Powers, 2017; Russell, 2018). In addition to large and mid-size developers looking to support the newly developing urban infrastructure, the increase in predatory real-estate practices in this area have increased which brings a large set of consequences for an area of individuals where very few residents own their homes and the number of investor-owned properties increases (Coleman, 2018, Green 2018).

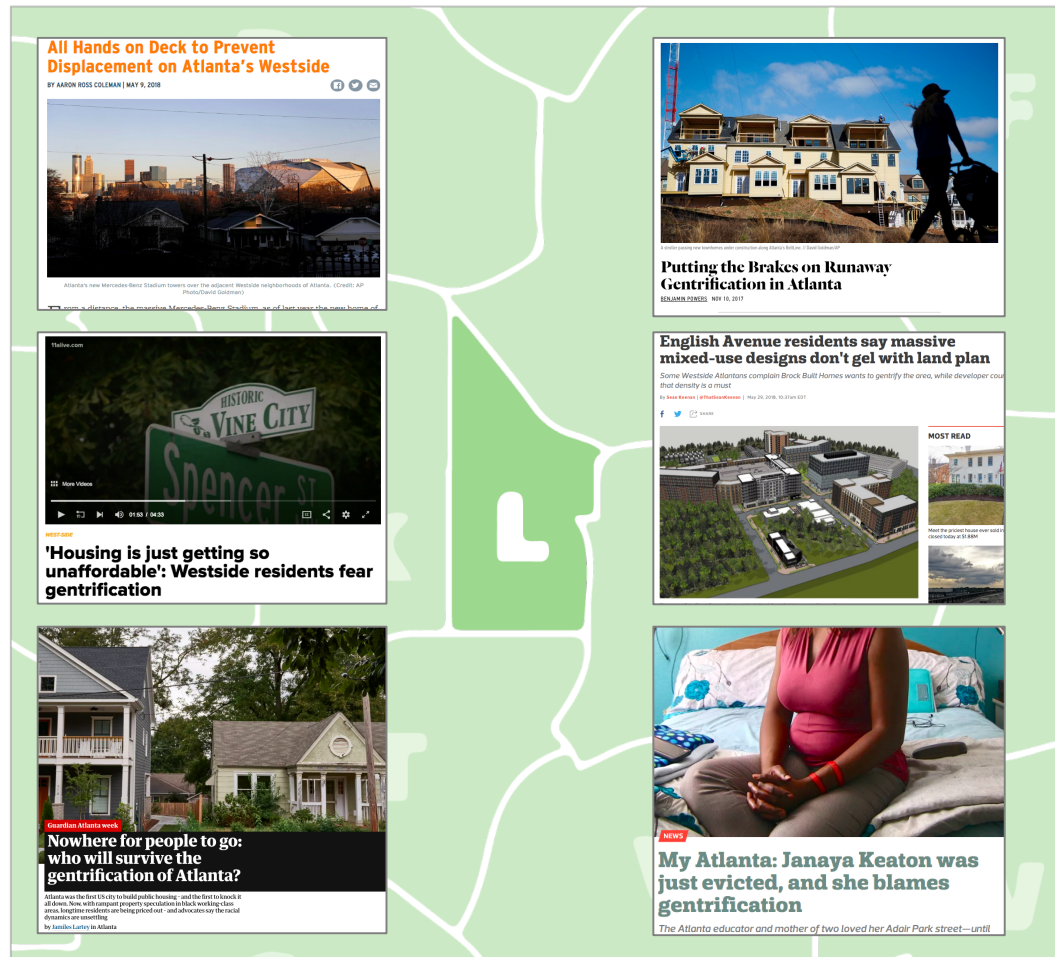


Figure 1.2.1 - Displacement in NPU-L through Unaffordable Housing

Many entities across multiple disciplines, including design practices, have sought to understand the influence of their work as it relates to gentrification (Angotti, 2017; Grodach, et al, 2017; Hamilton & Curran, 2018). The role of equity and creating a sustainable living for individuals, those residents who are looking to negotiate the conditions upon which they will allow for development to integrate into their neighborhoods, has become championed by several advocates within the social, civic, legal, academic and design sectors across the United States (Brothwell, et al, 1998; Gross, et al, 2005; Arkin, et al, 2007; Brasuell, 2016; Hamilton, et al, 2018; Hobson, 2017,

“Housing Justice League and Research Action Cooperative”, 2017). Notably, tools have been developed for communities to seek additional means of negotiating and leveraging property in their neighborhoods for the sake of ensuring the receive some measure of benefit from new development; this includes but is not limited to practices like implementing living wage policies, job-training programs, creating participatory planning workshops with residents, and the implementation of community benefits agreements (CBA) (Gross, et al, 2005; Arkin, et al, 2007). Specific to Atlanta, notable instances where the use of these tools have been used for local communities to illicit favorable conditions from developers. This has led to these and similar tools being supported by city agencies and adjacent community organizations that believe they should be further incorporated into the development and community engagement process (Arkin, et al.2007, LeDantec, et al, 2016, HouseATL, 2018). In conjunction with successful, local and national instances where these agreements have worked, the popularity of tools like have brought a larger consideration to how residents are able to negotiate, participate in, and ultimately impact the development of their neighborhood’s state through the identifying assets within their community and leveraging the interest of developers so that their quality of life can be improved (Gross, et al, 2005). However, with that being said, these tools due possess inherent drawback and, in the context of NPU-L, do not ensure that residents will not be left vulnerable. Support through job-training, information workshops, and living-wage programs have been implemented within these neighborhoods throughout its history and over that time the change in residents who qualify as being rent-burdened, existing within poverty, and able to remain or purchase a home has seen small incremental shifts over the past seventeen years (Gross, et al, 2005; Arkin, et al, 2007; “Demographics”, 2019). In

addition, the community benefit agreements provide support to a community when large development is willing to follow through on the terms that have been established within the document. Imposing penalties and consequences for violating these agreements are hard to exact, especially within Atlanta, due to the fact that these agreements are not formed with a legal governing body to provide survey and oversight. This means that the agreement places a burden on residents to volunteer their time, resources, and finances to hire legal counsel to create a document which may be ultimately disregarded; in the event that a community wanted to push for accountability through a court of law, the demand on their resources would be further extended (Gross, et al, 2005; Arkin, et al, 2007). While these tools are important and should still be pursued, Atlanta residents looking for a means of oversight and accountability are theoretically able to pursue this through the NPU-system due to the responsibility of City of Atlanta governance to review the vote of NPUs as a part of their process to approve or deny applications. While this affirms the intent and spirit of the Neighborhood Unit Planning System in its entirety, the effectiveness of this system with regard to its ability to intervene for NPU-L, which has both quantitatively and qualitatively provided evidence of being subjected to displacement through unwanted development, should be observed and understood.

CHAPTER 2. THE MEETING SPACE OF NPU-L

The Neighborhoods of English Avenue and Vine City meet once a month to take collective action as a planning unit. This experience is heavily shaped by the materiality of this physical environment, the artifacts that inhabit this space, and the actors that will occupy this monthly gathering. As a way to understand how the systematic issue of displacement pervades into the social interactions held within this public meeting space, the operation of these meetings has been observed and analyzed through several ethnographic design practices and frameworks.

2.1 Methodology of Observations

To better understand the context of the space and operations held within the NPU-L meeting environment, the structure for observations were constructed as to ensure that any information gathered from this setting could be authentic, objective, and not exploitative. With consideration for the socio-economic status and historic significance of this environment, as well as insight provided by residents, colleagues, and advisors, it was important to keep in mind that this community has been subject to a number of research studies conducted by several of the surrounding academic institutions. As described by residents, many studies have been conducted in the past which placed the communities within this area at the center of research studies with very little incentive or opportunity to participate. When research was completed, residents who had participated in these studies were not included into the analysis of the information gathered nor was the ultimate intent of gathering this information ever disclosed. As a result, resident's opinion of this work centered more around their distrust with the lack of visibility, incentive, consistent

communication and fatigue with having information sourced from their community through a number of quantitative processes. With this being understood, it felt purposeful to create a methodology for all observations that did not require residents to participate outside of their natural behavior. Individuals that conduct, participate, or attend in NPU meetings are doing so as volunteers and so the means in which they carried out this behavior felt as if it should not be inhibited. In addition, due to the affect that would be naturally associated with the full disclosure of my study, the decision to provide full details was not done immediately and only done so after the duration of time allotted for observations was completed. During this time of observation, however, relevant parts of my identity and association to the academic institution of Georgia Institute of Technology were disclosed as to help support the context for, and verification of, my qualifications as a resident of NPU-L and current occupation. This did not incite any issue nor cause any notable evidence of the “Hawthorne Effect”, which was a concern for the study; if those observed felt that the understanding being collected through observation was dependent on their behavior then they would feel burdened to be mindful of their behavior and therefore hide any important insight that would’ve otherwise been observable (Landsberger, 1958). Another important consideration established within the construction of the observation methodology was for limiting the collection of information that could be used to identify any of the individuals being observed. Though NPU-L exists within a larger civic structure which is serviced by elected and public officials, their information already being public would not exclude them from being having the implications of this study be misrepresented. To avoid creating vulnerability for individuals that did not receive disclosure to this observation, important information that would allow description of

Observations within NPU-L were conducted over a span of ten months. During this time, nine meetings within NPU-L were held and, of that amount, eight NPU-L meetings were observed. To understand which elements of the NPU-L culture were unique, attendance and observation of three additional NPU meetings outside of L were conducted at NPU-X, NPU-M, and NPU-G. Though these were originally intended to help create a standard, the consistency in consecutive attendance to the NPU-L meetings created a clear display of decorum that was either unique to NPU-L or standard across the entire planning unity system. Through this series of on-going immersive experiences, the objective was to understand the common experience held within this monthly area without forming any immediate opinion on design opportunities or needs for intervention. To remain both unobstructed and exploratory, observations were geared towards assuming the role of a resident; this required very little difficulty as a resident zoned for this particular NPU. This allowed for observation of fellow residents to be conducted in a way that was organic and provided important insight due to the shared common knowledge and common experience of being a resident within this geographical area. However, this full participant vantage point did inhibit my approach for data collection and the nature of the unstructured interviews that were had throughout this observation phase. To remain a full participant, the ethnographic information recorded and captured while conducting observation was fairly limited and discrete; the rationale for this practice was informed by the decision to not incite inquiry or disrupt the natural flow of environment. To supplement the information that was not recorded, notes provided by the recording secretary for meetings were used to help reference and recall instances where a notable action took place. In addition, several meetings held within the 2018 NPU calendar year were recorded by a

resident and placed on a public domain for reference by residents (Brown, 2010). This took a considerable amount of pressure off of having to record information for the sake of clarity since a digital reference, in both the meeting notes and the video recordings were being produced. As a result, the majority of the observations that took place came from a full participant vantage point where the understanding that came from the being a verified resident of the English Avenue neighborhood, attendant of NPU meetings, and therefore able to attend and collect information that would be available to the general public found within these monthly meetings. This is not to say, however, that a consideration for partisanship was not given consideration; participation as both an observer and researcher brought certain instances where resident-specific activities felt like they could essentially be conflicts of interest. In voting on matters that felt that they would change the way the NPU environment operated on a monthly basis, the choice was made to abstain from voting. With this regard, voting for elected officials and officers that would make up the executive board were also not participated within. In general, opportunities where a decision could be made as a participant, which would ultimately separate the act of observation from participation and encourage the personal influence that could be caused through participation, were avoided.

Though the design ethnography practices used through this study were focused towards being open and exploratory, they were guided and processed using several design methods which are common for capturing qualitative data that can be later mined for insight. Though not all practices were known prior to starting observations, many had been determined early and helped inform what would be beneficial in establishing the scope and focus of the study's observational period. The casual nature in which the NPU environment

would be observed felt as if it could benefit from having some supporting, organizational framework to help filter the most noteworthy elements of the NPU setting and thereby present general categories that would be useful in determining areas of overlap or opportunity. Furthermore, for the sake of not presenting bias in how details of an observation was coded or defined, using a pre-existing framework which already had pre-defined taxonomy was extremely important. As a result, the AEIOU analysis technique was used as a means to deconstruct the complexity of the civic NPU meeting space into five areas of focus: activities that happen in the midst of observation, environments where these activities take place, interactions had between a person with someone or something, objects that have a large impact on the environment, and the users who are demonstrating the behavior and preferences being observed. Each of these elements presents a critical taxonomy to help characterize the space being observed and a way to understand the dynamics that exist between the bodies and artifacts that occupy this space once a month. While each one can present a valuable amount of insight to be analyzed further, the pairing of additional frameworks and methodologies placed a heavier emphasis on some of these focal points than others. As stated, the nature of the observations performed were done with ethical consideration for what information would be sourced and later represented through this study. For this reason, it was imperative to remove any unique indicators from the way persons were identified within this space. After several months of establishing familiarity with fellow NPU-L residents over several consecutive meetings it became apparent that the way users had to be identified could not provide in-depth detail due to the bias that would be inherited in these descriptions. In addition, because of the configuration of the meeting spaces and the number of attendants within most meetings, it would be much

harder to establish a means of categorizing users that wouldn't provide some connection back to their personal identity. Furthermore, the understanding that the information being captured alongside my observation, which exists as public record, seemed to ensure that the information reported through this study could possibly make a resident able to be identified. With that same understanding, the reporting done on the interactions that took place from person to person were kept extremely general; the notes recorded for each meeting highlights resident's names and the recordings that take place within the environment would allow for any unique observation to create opportunity to reveal the identity of a resident.

A Activities	Approval of Minutes, Introduction of Speakers, Discussion, Voting...
E Environment	On the Rise Financial Center [810 Joseph E. Boone Blvd] Vine City Civic Association Center [678 Joseph E. Boone Blvd]
I Interactions	Member to Member, Member to Object, Representative to Member, Representative to Object...
O Objects	Sign-In Sheet, Voting Paddles, Meeting Agendas, Presentation Posters...
U Users	NPU-L Resident Member, NPU-L Stakeholder, City Planner, Development Representatives...

Figure 2.1.2 - Sample of NPU AEIOU Organization

The qualitative, observational items which were given the most focus was related to the environment where the NPU meetings took place, the activities that took place within that environment and the objects that were used within this environment. This was used to not only remain in accordance with seeing the NPU as a stationary point where elements of systematic gentrification could be noted and tracked, but because these items are both

relatively consistent and provide opportunity for physical sense-making. The construction of this observation was integrated with the AEIOU framework as a means for categorizing the information being observed, but the analysis of this work would be done through the additional design methods of artifact and content analysis. This decision was made ahead of observation as a way to establish direction for the study and give purpose to the application of design methods used throughout this study; the focus was to examine the environment with a consideration for how the intentionality in design of the environment or objects used within this environment could impact the behavior of the activities, interactions, and users within this environment. This inherently meant that more emphasis would be given to understanding the environment and the artifacts that were used within it. This, however, did not mean that other elements of this observation would be downplayed. In fact, the elements which were reported with general information and insight are not being redacted but given a certain anonymity by describing them with relation to the environment and artifacts. In fact, the emphasis on the physical space and artifacts helps create a focal point to place users and their interactions into context. Through understanding of the material and physical elements that make up the civic structure of NPU-L, the behavior and cultural elements that exist within this area are given a deeper sense of value for how potential areas of opportunity are identified later.

2.2 Physical Environment Layout

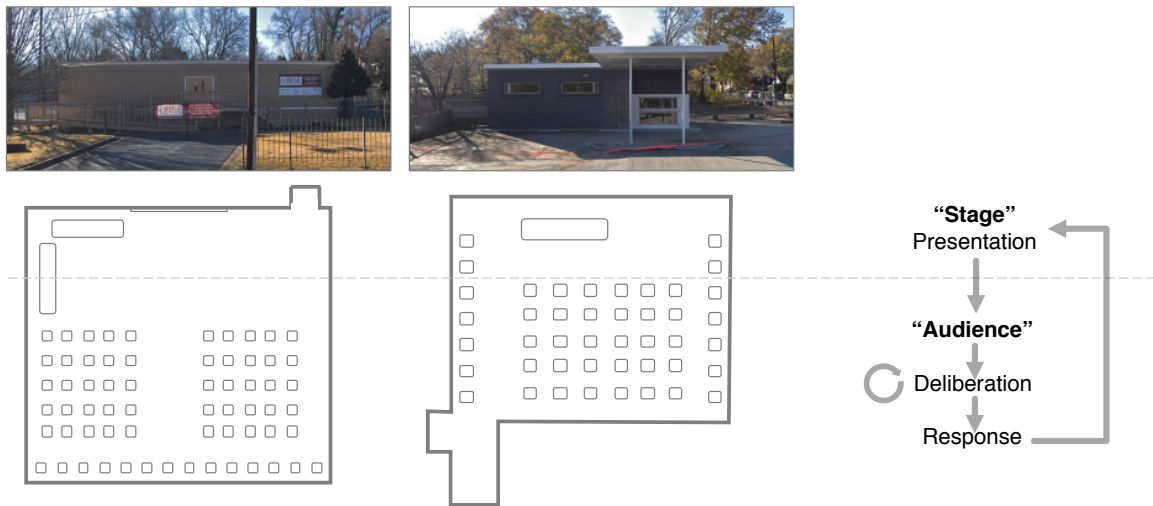


Figure 2.2.1 - NPU Environment Layouts

2.2.1 *On-The Rise Financial Center*

As a way to respond to the lack of information on and access to affordable banking and credit products located on the Westside, the On the Rise Financial Center (ORFC) was launched in April 2017. Aware of the financial statistics that are attributed to the area within this area, ORFC provides financial education and one-on-one financial counselling to help residents develop practices to improve credit, decrease high cost debt, build savings and access affordable financial services. This financial consultation center is located at off of both Joseph E. Boone and Andrew J. Hairston Boulevard and was the monthly venue for the eleven NPU-L Meetings held within the 2018 NPU calendar year. The overall layout of the center is comprised of several room dedicated to office space and two larger rooms used for the events regularly scheduled at center during business hours or on weekends when workshops are provided. The modular equipment used to turn these larger rooms into a meeting space are provided by the center; the center supplies about forty office chairs

which can be unfolded and flip-top nesting tables which can be placed in the within the meeting room and along the single hallway that connects the entirety of the small, one-story building. These tables are often positioned parallel to the length of the hallway with a single desk placed perpendicular to the wall; this table is intentionally positioned right before the doorway to the meeting room as a welcome desk. The additional desks are located within the meeting room to be used by the executive board who are often responsible for the arrangement of these center-provided items. ORFC's operating hours on Tuesdays end three hours before the beginning of the NPU-L meeting, meaning that center is otherwise closed by the time the meeting starts and end. As a result, the responsibility for re-structuring the room was often assumed by members who remained after NPU meetings were adjourned and done as courtesy to ORFC. The meeting room being used was able to comfortably seat over forty people but was often occupied by an additional ten to fifteen people who looked to attend the meeting and would stand against a wall. It was often observed that the individuals, whether sitting or standing, would periodically walk out of the room to congregate in the hallway while the meeting was going on. In addition, some individuals were observed entering ORFC to disseminate information or converse with other attendants out in the hallway but never actually enter the meeting space.

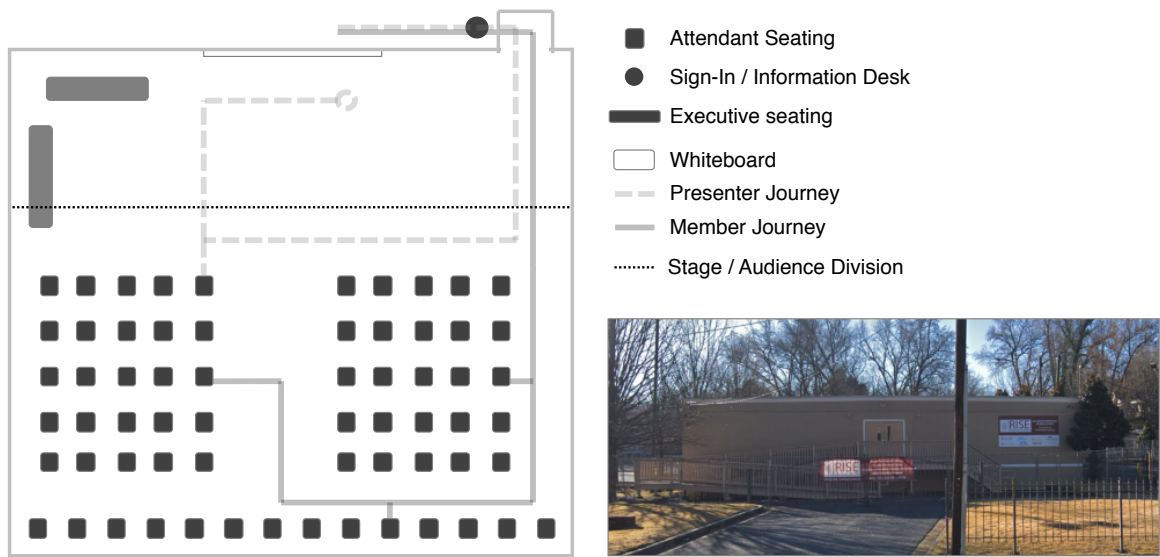


Figure 2.2.2 - ORFC NPU Meeting Layout

To establish clarity on the boundaries defining the interactions relevant to this study, the NPU-L meeting venue found within ORFC that was given significance was the room where the meeting was actually being held. Any user that crossed the threshold of the doorway and objects which were used within the square footage of the room were regarded in observation and therefore given consideration throughout the study. This also included members of the ORFC which attended meetings, even if their intent was to provide instructions on general house-keeping rules. During the time observations took place, there was only one observed instance where the general body of the NPU-L meeting was addressed by an individual associated with the ORFC. In this instance, the individual provided the general body with the ultimatum of assuming a more respectful, reserved tone in how they communicated amongst themselves or they would abruptly end the meeting. Outside of this instance, the presence of individuals associated with ORFC did not demand acknowledgement nor disrupted the observed behaviour / power dynamics held within the meeting room environment. It should also be noted that a rolling utility cart,

which held an audio-visual projector, was located within the room but never used during any of the sessions that were observed. This item remained stationary and was often used to prop up a single foam-core board which leaned against the whiteboard within the room, an item which was heavily used during observed sessions and helped guide the way attendants oriented themselves within the space. This orientation not only established the front of the room, but established the “stage” of the room where speakers and presentations were encouraged to be held. Attendants of these NPU meetings, regardless of their role as resident or outside party, sat in the provided seating and would orient themselves so that that their line of sight was focused on the whiteboard. Despite the fact that the only tables inside the meeting room were placed adjacent to the whiteboard, residents very rarely re-oriented their seating so that the executive board, the presiding body which guided the meeting or provided insight at the request of the body, would be in better view. Furthermore, the layout of the room established an observable front, but also a middle; the layout of the chairs within the interior of the room followed a scheme of three rows of five chairs with a notable spacing between the two sets of fifteen chairs. This created a walkway for individuals who would need to move through the meeting either from the rows of seats or the additional ten chairs that were placed along the perimeter of the back wall. This open spacing within the middle was often observed as the location where presenters would place themselves within the front of the room, thereby assuming a location where everyone could see and hear them. Movement down the middle of this room was observed to be used mostly by individuals looking to access the front of the room; individuals looking to enter or exit through the single doorway would often move along the back or sidewall closest to

the door, where the overflow of residents stood, as to avoid moving into the center of attention.

2.2.2 Vine City Civic Association Center

Towards the end of the 2018 NPU calendar year, nominations for executive board members were made in preparation for the November meeting where voting would take place. At this meeting, residents who had attended several consecutive general body meetings were permitted to cast votes to determine who would serve as members of the executive body for the next coming year. Notably, none of the individuals who currently held office on the executive board placed themselves in consideration for serving in the next year and some were observed as refusing to accept any nomination for serving again. In addition, open discussion within the meeting had been observed in meetings prior where residents had spoken about their frustrations for how the NPU had operated over the past calendar year. Many of the individuals observed as having frustration about the operation of these meetings assumed leadership roles on the NPU executive board for the following year. To draw any conclusions or inferences about the motivation of the general body's intentions on voting residents in or out of leadership positions would be outside the role of an observer, but the information being provided is important for establishing context to the additional shifts that took place following the November meeting.

In January of 2019, the venue for the monthly NPU-L meeting changed to the Vine City Civic Association Center (VCCAC). This building, located at the intersection of Joseph E. Boone Boulevard and Sunset Ave NW, serves as a multi-purpose meeting place for the Vine City community. This space is owned by a single, long-term resident who uses

both the interior of the space for a variety of weekly discussions and the exterior of the space, a blacktop parking lot equipped with a basketball goal and half court boundary lines, for engaging the local youth. The observed sentiment of the owner and operator of this space is that it should exist as a venue for the local community to congregate and have open discussion about how to address local issues within community by creating community-sourced solutions. The layout of this meeting space provides, in many ways, solutions and alternatives to the some of the observed nuances that existed in the previous NPU-L meeting venue. While explanations for this change in venue vary based on observation and inquiry from several individuals, it was noted that ORFC developed a policy of offering the use of their space for rent. While the relocation of the NPU meeting venues is not necessarily uncommon or noteworthy within itself, the influence this new environment had on the way previous meetings operated was observed.

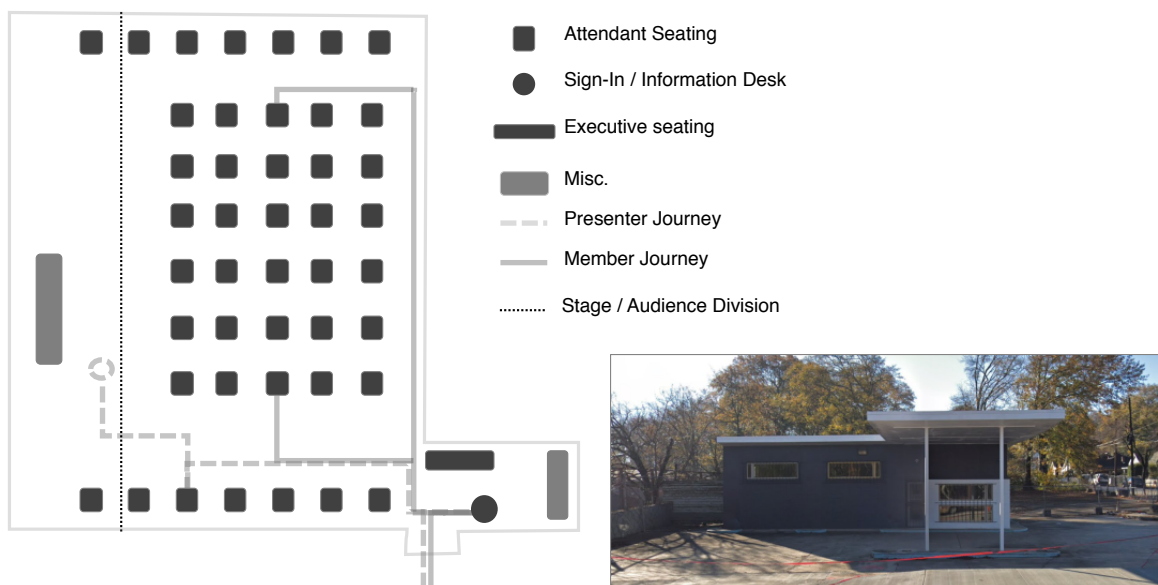


Figure 2.2.3 - VCCAC NPU Meeting Layout

Similar to the previous meeting space, the building has a single doorway for entry and exit; though the building does come equipped with a large garage door that can be raised or lowered, this feature was never observed in use during an NPU-L meeting. Upon entering the room, attendants to the meeting immediately into a foyer where a table, sofa and reception desk are placed to help people sign-in and/or collect information. This area is often also used as the overflow space for attendants or a congregating space for individuals seeking to have an aside without disrupting the flow of the meeting. Upon moving past this point, the main room where NPU-L meetings take place is filled with posters, sculptures, and decorated chairs which follow the perimeter of the space. Chairs are often distributed in four rows of seven chairs, with ten chairs located along the wall opposite of the entrance. The wall shared with the doorway is outfitted with several office chairs that are integrated in with decorative chairs that are also used; this area is often observed as the space where individuals looking to present within meetings will situation themselves as to have an immediate walkway to the front of the twenty-eight seats placed in the middle of the room. Though this space does not possess a whiteboard or middle walkway, the front is established by the direction the mass of chairs in the middle are facing and the single table located in front of them. The executive board is located at this table and presenters are observed as standing to the left or right of this table as the address the general body. Though there is capability for audio-visual display through the use of the large TV located in the corner of the room, no individual who has presented during an NPU general body meeting has used this feature. There is a space between the center seating and the chairs that are placed along the perimeter of the room which creates a walkway for residents and attendants to move; however, it has been observed that these walkways are

often inhibited by an overflow of people and therefore occasionally impede foot-traffic. In addition, the construction of seating does not provide a middle aisle which has resulted in instances being observed where individuals have no choice but to exit the meeting space by having to move in front of other seated residents. This disruption and distraction in concentration and flow of the meeting has not been brought up during observation and seems to have very little effect on the residents remaining in the meeting.

2.3 Conduct and Flow of the NPU Meeting

Department of City Planning - Office of Zoning & Development | Atlanta City Hall - 55 Trinity Avenue
Atlanta, GA 30303 - Suite 3350 | (404) 330-4545 - NPUMail@atlantaga.gov

NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING UNIT - L

Department of
CITY PLANNING

MEETING INFO
Date & Time: Tuesday, July 10, 2018 - 7:00 PM
Location: On The Rise Financial Center
610 Joseph E. Boone Blvd Atlanta, GA 30314

CONTACT INFO
Pamela Flores, NPU-L, Chairperson - (404) 316-2653 or pamela.flores@atlantaga.gov
Monique Forte, City of Atlanta, Planner - (404) 546-0196 or monique.forte@atlantaga.gov
Erica Pines, City of Atlanta, Asst. Director - (404) 546-0159 or erica.pines@atlantaga.gov
Keyetha Holmes, City of Atlanta, Interim Director - (404) 546-0166 or keyetha.holmes@atlantaga.gov

AGENDA

1. Call to Order/Opening Remarks - NPU-L General Meeting Rules, Voting Procedures & Map
2. Approval of Agenda & Minutes
3. Reports from City Departmental Representatives + Comments from Elected Officials
 - Code Enforcement, Fire, Housing Authority, Police, Public Schools, Public Works, Watershed, etc.
4. ZUWH Committee Report/Planner's Report/City Matters for Voting
 - Zoning Ordinance Update Phase II
5. Other Committee Reports/Matters for Voting (Executive, Finance & Public Safety Committees)

Zoning Review Board Applications(s) - 2018		
Application	Property Address	Public Hearing Date
1.1.15.2 (Vote Required) An Ordinance by Councilmember Ivory Lee Young, Jr. granting a special use permit for a barbershop for property located at 647 Magnolia Street, N. W. Lot 157, 14th District, Fulton County, Georgia NPU L, Council District 3.	647 Magnolia Street NW	July 10 or 12, 2018

Please visit the City of Atlanta Website at: www.AtlantaGa.Gov

Robert's Rules

1. presented
2. a clearly worded motion
3. member must second.
4. it not move forward.
5. video clarify
6. 2 questions and 2 minutes
7. item may be offered
8. on by _____
9. video voting
10. the vote

Legend

- Streets
- Council Districts
- NPUs

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atlantaga.gov

City of Atlanta's Code of Conduct

Director of city hall, its signs without finaling or photographing in this section shall average purposes by

not be used for

Figure 2.3.1 - 2018 NPU Monthly Meeting Agenda

The monthly agenda for each meeting is created by the City of Atlanta's Department of City Planning. These documents are observed to be updated from one to two weeks in

advance of an upcoming meeting date. As these are disseminated down from the City Planning Department, they are made available online for public access and sent to the NPU-L Chairperson for review. This content provided in this document is dynamic not only with respect to the month-to-month information placed within it but also with regard to the structure upon which the agenda has adopted since the change in executive board and venue.

In meetings held within the 2018 calendar year, meetings started at seven at night and were initiated by a call to order. The agenda would then proceed by reviewing housekeeping items relevant to decorum and voting procedures. At this point the agenda and minutes would be reviewed and requested approval from the general body. The request for approval, the call for a matter that requires a vote, and the process upon which voting is carried out is all done through the guidelines and procedures outlined in Robert's Rules of Order. It should be noted, in accordance with these procedures, the general body is unable to perform any voting if they do not have a quorum of fifteen members (attendants who are at-least eighteen years of age with a verified residence, property, organization, agency or business within the NPU-L geography). If at this point the meeting does not have quorum then it is impeded until the appropriate number of members have arrived. Once this approval had been established and recorded, the designated city planner would be given the floor to introduce any information or legislation relevant to the City of Atlanta and the residents of the NPU. Acting as a city government representative, this time, when observed, was to allow for residents to gain a sense of transparency and understanding for any items the City of Atlanta's government bodies were looking for resident feedback on. If the city planner was not present or there were not city government matters to be

addressed then this part of the meeting was skipped or called to be tabled by the general body. At the conclusion of the planner's report, representatives from various city departments would give their monthly report as it related to the NPU geography. These departments included, but were not limited to, the departments of code enforcement, fire, housing authority, police, public schools, public works and watershed management. These oral reports are given as means to present a comprehensive statistical breakdown and explanation, by a representative with expert insight, on topics that impact resident's day-to-day well-being. The report and discussion that takes place during this time is often relevant to how the communities within the unit performed over the month, how these departments responded to a situation that took place, or gave notice to an opportunity or issue that residents should be aware of.

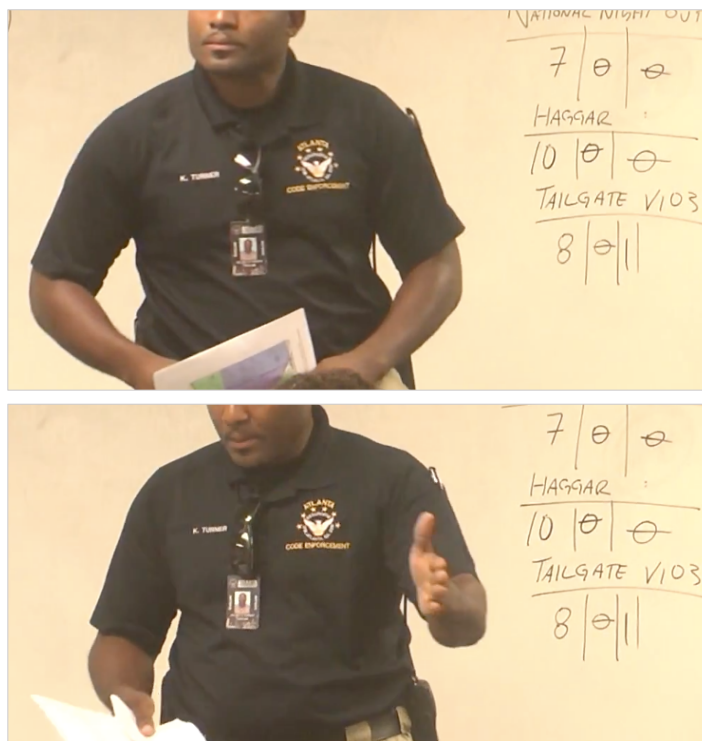


Figure 2.3.2 - Report by City of Atlanta Code Enforcement

Upon completion of reports made by external community departments, the floor is made available for individuals who serve on additional committees within the NPU to give reports on relevant NPU-L matters. These reports would help give internal insight on NPU specific operations and any suggestions that had been made outside of the NPU general-body meeting. Ideally, these reports would allow for the general body to be informed and give feedback in the event members of these committees were looking to call the general body to take action through confirming a decision by the committee or even forming a new committee to focus on a particular item that can't be addressed within time dedicated to the general body meeting. After this addressed, matters required for general body voting which included zoning, licensing, land-use, amendments, proposed legislation relevant to NPU-L are presented to the general body for consideration. From observation, this is where the largest amount of time is spent during the general body meeting in the event that the applicant or representative are present. This part of the meeting is often where the NPU exercises the authority bestowed to this civic body with regard to the unit's ability to voice their support or disdain for an item being presented. In addition, this is where the members of the executive board, which facilitate the meetings, and presenters, which are often looking for a vote of support, are most dependent on the determination of the general body. As observed, instances where the general body is looking to gain more clarification on what should be determined in the meeting, whether that is related to understanding the speaker's request or the available options being presented by the executive board, are very frequent during this time. Upon completion of all voting matters, the floor is then made available for any individuals who have reached out prior to the meeting and received permission to make an announcement or informational presentation to the general body.

This time is often used to announce upcoming events where attendance and participation from residents within the NPU would be pertinent. Due to the frequency of these meetings, information is often presented several weeks in advance as to anticipate the fact that general body would otherwise not reconvene until after the date of the event. If time allows, the floor is then opened up to the general body for any announcements that were not included within the agenda but would like to be made by any remaining attendants to the general body. The measure of how much time that is allotted is not necessarily consistent amongst all observations, but an unspoken sense of fatigue is often visible in the tone and expressions of individuals in attendance once the meeting has lasted longer than two hours. Though no ending time is printed on the agendas provided, several comments were observed from both the 2018 and 2019 Chairperson with regard to finishing the meetings by or around nine at night.

Overall, the change in structure to the operation of the NPU-L Meeting was minimal but provided notable difference in how meetings have proceeded. Though a large majority of the agenda is identical to the line items covered in the previous format, the arrangement and time of these items have been shifted. Meetings now start at six-thirty at night and begin with introductions and opening remarks by the executive committee. This is to acclimate attendants to the information that will be discussed and introduce any individuals who are in attendance and plan to attend the meeting. At this point the departmental representatives and elected officials that are present are given the opportunity to speak for a designated amount of time. If the department or elected official is not present during their designated time to give a report, the report is not provided. Overall, there is twenty minutes allotted total for each department to present information; three minutes is

given to representatives to give their report and five minutes to elected officials looking to provide insight and updates. While this does not include time for discussion and inquiry issued by the general body, each presentation during this time is limited to three questions from the general body. Notably, to hold to this concise format, an informal and formal options have been provided to members of the general body to pursue. In the event that a large number of individuals would like to receive more information about a matter being presented, the executive board or general body can invite the individual to attend an additional meeting that will be held the first week of the following month. These meetings have been described as NPU “informational sessions” and are strictly designed to allow for the community to further interface with organizations, representatives, and presenters who have or will be addressing the general body during the NPU meeting. It has been observed on several instances that a disclaimer, explaining that no voting takes place at these meetings, has been made by the NPU-L chairperson to the general body. Despite this formal option for increasing the amount of time residents interface with presenters, residents also have an informal option for engaging with representatives once their presentation time has expired. With most representatives that report during this part of the meeting, upon completing their report they exit the building. For this reason, many representatives extend the opportunity for individuals to engage with them outside the meeting area so that additional discussion can be had. To-date, this interaction has been observed in the four NPU meeting that has taken place during the 2019 calendar year. Though this informal option could cause a large amount of disruption to the general body meeting if the majority of residents felt they needed to discuss the issue further, it has

seemed to effectively carry conversation not relevant to the progress of the agenda out of the general body setting.

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NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING UNIT – L

Department of
CITY PLANNING

MEETING INFO
Date & Time: Tuesday, January 8, 2019 – 6:30 PM
Location: Integrity Transformations CDC
662 Lindsay St., NW, Atlanta, GA 30318

CONTACT INFO
Jennifer McIntosh, NPU-L, Chairperson – (678) 561-2202 or chair@npuatlanta.org
Rodney Milton, City of Atlanta, Planner – (404) 335-1944 or rmilton@AtlantaGa.Gov
Erica Pines, City of Atlanta, Asst. Director – (404) 546-0150 or epines@AtlantaGa.Gov
Keyetta Holmes, City of Atlanta, Interim Director – (404) 546-0166 or khholmes@AtlantaGa.Gov

AGENDA

6:30 pm

1. Opening Remarks/Introductions
2. Reports from Departmental Representatives (3 min) + Comments from Elected Officials (5 min)

6:50 pm

1. Call to order
2. Approval of Minutes
3. Presentations/Announcements
 - Westside Revive: Council District 3 Neighborhood Master Plan
4. Planners report/Matters for voting (Voting Members Only)

Liquor License Application(s) – LRB				
Name of Business	Type of Business	Applicant	Property Address	Request
Taco Magic Event Space (Vote Required)	Event Space	Commandus Morgan	630 Travis Street	New Business
Walmart #3208 (Vote Required)	Retail Grocery	Herman M. Ford	835 Martin Luther King Junior Drive	Change of Agent

Board of Zoning Adjustment Application(s) – BZA		
Application	Property Address	Public Hearing Date
V-19-087 (Vote Required) Applicant seeks a variance from the zoning regulations to 1) reduce the required north side yard setback from 7 feet to 4.5 feet and 2) reduce the required south yard setback from 7	408 Andrew J. Hairston Street NW	January 3, 2019

Use Permit

adding a definition of Use Permit, *only*.

s. Adult day care is to adults who need promotes social and s routine and daily

er adults who need ers and caregivers, their relative is well zation by providing

ld be limited to **no to 7:00 p.m.**, and nfirm, physically ed within 2000 feet in the R-1, R-2, R-roposed location of ing district in order y Affairs under the

bruary 7 or February

December 2018

Figure 2.3.3 - 2019 NPU Monthly Meeting Agenda

The new format of the NPU-L agenda designates that a call to order is to be made at 6:50 at night though it has been observed to take place at a later time. The reason exclaimed for the twenty-minute window between the start of the meeting and the call to order, as well as any additional wait-time added to this window, was to ensure that quorum could be met before the meeting proceeds; this allotted time is also intentionally set aside

to allow for members already in attendance to review the minutes, voting matters, and relevant information provided within the agenda. At this point the executive body will call for the minutes from the last meeting, which have been provided, to be approved by the general body and for presentations and announcements from representatives that have been included into the agenda to commence. The report given by the planner and matters of voting are all placed in one line on the agenda, therefore allowing the designated city planner to make the appropriate introduction of city government material and also use this allotted time to provide insight into any ordinances and applications that were included into the agenda. It should also be noted that the agenda itself is not called to be confirmed by the general body which was a common practice during meetings held in the previous year. The Chairperson for this year cited that the bylaws of the NPU did not require for this step; by allowing the agenda to remain fluid, the general body is given the opportunity to make changes throughout the meeting as they feel are appropriate.

2.4 Common Attendants and Participants

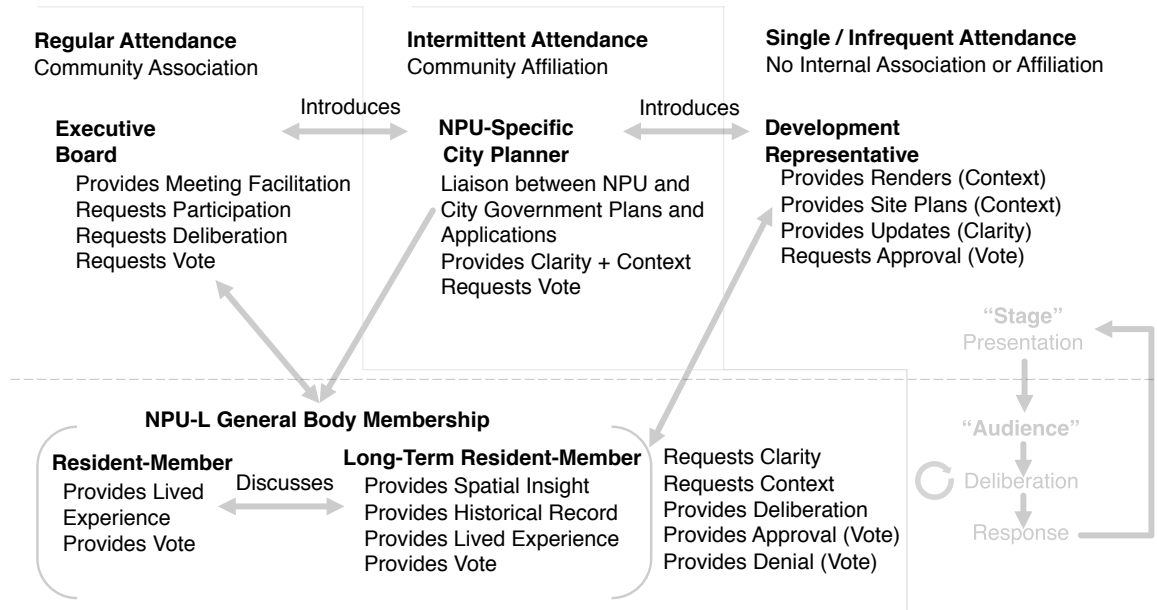


Figure 2.4.1 - Layout and Flow of NPU Attendant Interactions

Without the use of identifiers that would allow a single individual to be implicated as the subject of observation, many attendants to the monthly NPU-L meetings can be categorized based on their performed social roles within the meeting. In most instances, these roles are informed by whether or not the individual is a member, if the individual’s intent for being present in the meeting is to present to the general body or not, how long they have lived within the NPU-L area, and if they possess any additional insight on the topics being discussed due to their vocation. Based on these distinctions, important groups of individuals which commonly occupy the monthly NPU meeting space were observed as having a noticeable influence on how person-to-person interactions and, more specifically, discussions are had during the course of these monthly meetings. These common roles consistently find themselves on both the “stage” and “audience” of any NPU meeting environment with little difficulty for them to garner the attention of the general body; due

to the influence of their role they've been observed being able to change the course and tone of a discussion simply by speaking. This is particularly impactful especially with the consideration that the majority of these individuals belong to the general body and are not observed having to leave their location in the meeting space to assume the front or "stage". In addition, the distinctions that are being detailed as individual traits could be relevant to one member or several. A member that assumes several of these roles is able to further extend their ability to impact the way the general body not only receives their input, but are also able to leverage this identity to help further credit the statement or inquiry being made throughout the meeting.

2.4.1 Members of the Executive Committee

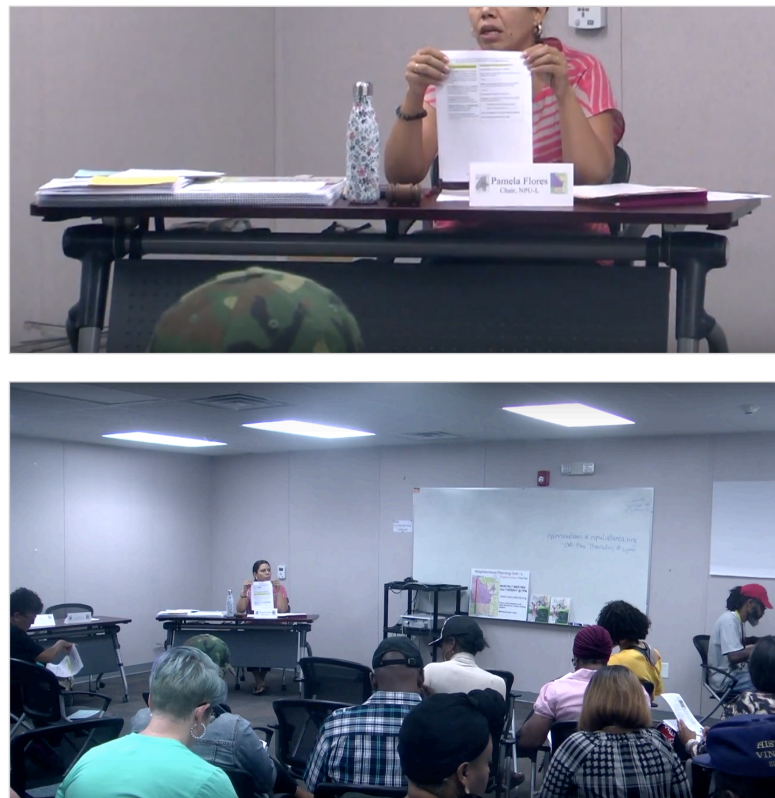


Figure 2.4.2 - Meeting Facilitation by NPU 2018 Chairperson

The elected officials of the executive committee do not have any distinguishable visual difference from other members outside the services that they are observed providing to the general body. As members who were nominated, confirmed, and elected to this board of volunteers they are expected to serve the entire calendar year of NPU meetings as representatives for the general body. Though the entirety of this board and their responsibilities are outlined in the NPU-L bylaws, many of the positions that are accounted in this document were not observed consistently through the meetings that were surveyed. As a result, the members which were most influential to holding the general body to a consistent operation of NPU-specific operations were observed in great detail. It should also be noted that these individuals, despite their specific responsibilities to the general body and as a member of the executive board, were often observed filling in for individuals that were not present. This means that the tasks they were observed doing may not have been specific to their role but their willingness to help support the operation of the NPU meeting. For example, the Parliamentarian, whose expressed responsibility was to try and keep the general body to a decorum that was respectful and civil, was often seen helping acclimate both members and non-members to the meeting space through supervising the requirement that attendants sign-in. This individual was also known to help facilitate the verification of membership, which was a prerequisite for voting, and the recording of voting though neither were consistently an expected responsibility. This role was also assumed by a recording secretary or vice-chair who would officiate the process of voting once it had been called to action and properly received a confirmation. In these instances, these board members focused more on ensuring that the general body was properly representing its decision through the manner upon which people voted to support, disdain, or abstain from

a particular motion. With both of these individuals, their responsibility held in accurately capturing this information as record to later be reviewed by the city and approved by the general body in later review. This information, often reviewed in the meeting minutes, holds detailed information not only relevant to the voter count but contains names of particular residents that call a motion to vote in front of the general body as well as those individuals that properly second that motion. As a result, this accuracy creates an important record and narrative to reference when establishing context for reflecting on the general body's sentiments towards a particular item being voted on.

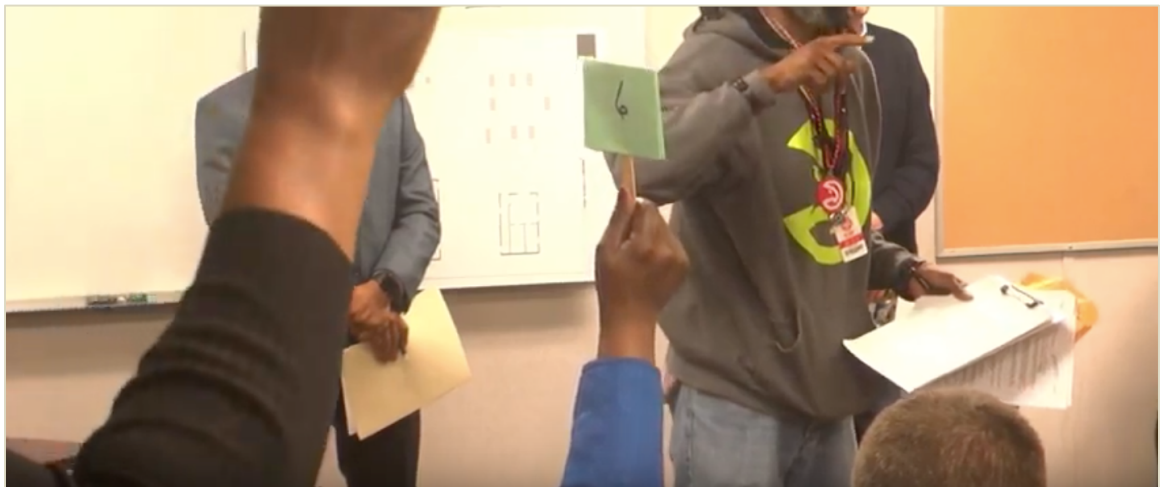


Figure 2.4.3 - Parliamentarian officiating Voting Procedure

The most consistently observed role on the executive committee through all of the observations performed was held by the Chairperson. This role operates as the head representative for the entire neighbourhood planning unit; the chairperson presides over a large geography which encompasses the two neighbourhood associations in this area which deliberate separately from the NPU. The information that is decided from these two entities is then requested from the chairperson as means to advise the decisions that are made within

the general body. This responsibility for interfacing with individuals within the NPU also includes residents and stakeholders who are interested in engaging with the general body of the NPU monthly meetings whether through announcement or through a matter which calls for the NPU body's show of support. The Chairperson acts as an access point for any intentions of informing the general body; this responsibility is most easily observed in how they prepare items for general body's consideration before the meeting and guide the operation of the meeting as it takes place. In many observed instances, the chairperson acts as the presiding council for both the representatives and members requesting an audience or inquiry during the meeting. This individual is often observed mirroring the responsibility of other executive committee members, whether they are present or absent, to encourage attendants to remain concise when reporting information and for members to be aware of the guidelines the meeting uses through Robert's Rules of Order. The Chairperson, while apart of the NPU, also acts as a liaison to both agencies outside of this structure and the city government officials that look to acclimate themselves within this space. As the officiating officer over this monthly meeting, this individual is often observed as having to translate, from one person to another, for individuals who may be misunderstanding one another. This observed practice often takes place when discussion or inquiry on a topic has exceeded the predetermined time limit and is initiated by the Chairperson acknowledging that discussion will either require more consideration or has become unproductive. At that moment, the Chairperson will offer the recommendation that the body take action to give this topic more time to contemplate or encourage the discussion to cease so that another item in the agenda can be addressed. Most importantly, these recommendations from the Chairperson are also noted when members of the general body are seeking clarity on ways

in which the general body can vote or on details of a topic requiring a vote which may seem ambiguous. As an individual who receives information from within the area as well as information from city officials who are not physically or figuratively located in the area, the Chairperson has been observed as providing additional insight outside of the printed information within the agenda and will advise the general body to consider information which might be pertinent to the body's interest when it has expressed apprehension about how to approach a topic which requires a vote.

2.4.2 *City Planner or City Officials*

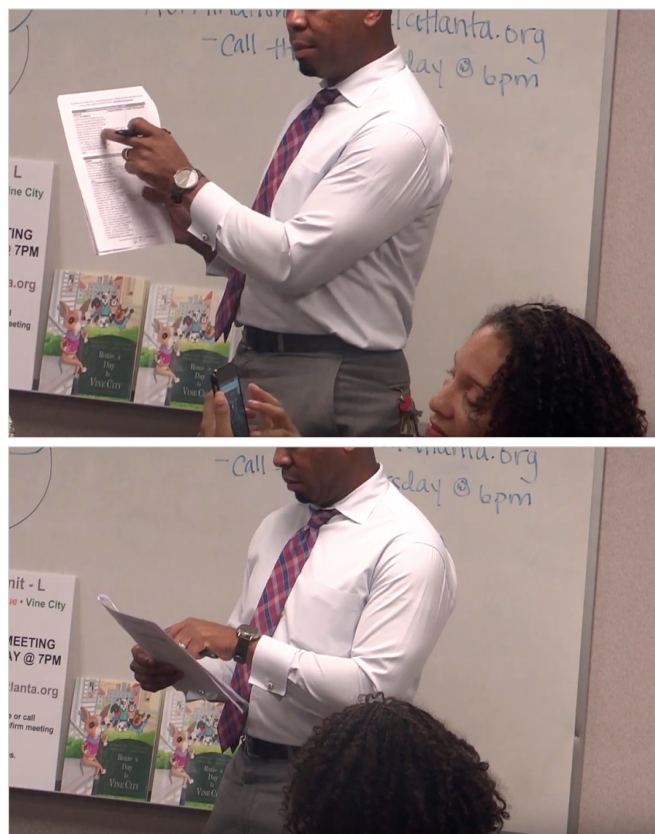


Figure 2.4.4 - City Planner delivering Planner's Report to NPU

The City of Atlanta Government is comprised of several departments, offices, agencies, and initiatives which are focused on aiding residents across the city. Many of these officials hold a responsibility for resident quality of life whether that be as immediate as offering safety through a policing of crime or a further removed service like a property-tax abatement program. Regardless, these individuals are often observed as individuals who are removed from the general body but civil servants to this community. These individuals are often present in meetings to offer reports or their expertise to the general body as a service to the community. This is consistently observed through the impact of the city planner which is designated for each NPU. This individual, who remains consistently assigned to this NPU, holds responsibility for managing the applicants which look for permission and support from the city as it relates to the NPU-L area. As a result, they hold a lot of knowledge as it pertains to the local matters being considered by the general body as they are the individual which prepares this information, through the construction of the monthly agenda, and disseminates it to the Chairperson for review before the monthly meeting date. This familiarity with the operations and initiatives of the City of Atlanta government, the intentions of outside agencies looking to acclimate themselves within the NPU-L space through the city, and the residents with whom the planner interfaces with on a monthly basis place this role at an interesting overlap with several important parties which are present within these meetings. As a result, this individual's designated time in the agenda is often observed as having to translate terms, legislation, and intentions of parties outside of the NPU meeting space as to help fully illustrate the impact and relevance of items being cited within any monthly meeting. Without inserting any bias, the city planner becomes responsible for helping oversee the

general understanding of the members of NPU-L, providing additional information and insight as it deemed necessary or requested. This obligation has been observed as even requiring this individual to assume the role as representative for an applicant when they are not present, giving them the responsibility of detailing the potential impact the general body's vote could have on their community.

2.4.3 Representatives of Corporation, Agency, or Institution



Figure 2.4.5 - Representatives presenting development project

This individual not only represents one of the roles which are often the subject of intense discussion amongst the general body but also a role which doesn't consistently participate in monthly meetings or holds consistent association to the NPU-L area. This is an important distinction from the identity of an NPU member who identifies themselves as a stakeholder; these members are eligible to vote and make decisions due to the location of their business, agency, or institution being located within the two adjacent neighbourhoods within NPU-L. In instances where they are seeking to change some detail to their place of residence, business, or institution it is often not met with resistance and the general body is often already familiar with the applicant and their request. Though they are not always residents of this community, they are invested in the livelihood of this community due to their pre-established, long-standing service to the community. Representatives, in this context, is a reference for individuals who are not bound to the NPU-L geography outside of their interest in development of a future program, agency, business, real-estate development, or et cetera. These representatives come as liaisons between their corporation and the community as an informant on the intentions and development of that outside body. As a result, they are often observed using terms and language which is homogenous to their corporation and sometimes foreign to the members of the general body. Furthermore, this role as merely a spokesperson for a project can, on some occasions, to avoid being held accountable for relaying in-depth insight on nuances of the project as well as the rationale for internal decision-making done on the project since their reported responsibility is to simply engage the community through this report of intention and/or progress. In several instances, they are observed with visual aid that is used to help further define and place context to this technical phrasing and will often give explanations and presentations based

on the visuals provided. Much of the observed information that is presented to the community is relevant to the information requested of them from the City of Atlanta government when seeking consideration for approval and permit. As a result, this information is often technical and relevant to the context of the specific plot of land they are attempting to use. In addition, the explanation of the information that is being presented by representatives is often a future illustration or projection on how this corporation feels their commercial project will benefit the area that they intend to change. Representatives, when presenting this information, are not often observed as addressing the current benefits of this area but lead with presenting the future-use and vision of the project and how progress can be made to develop the area to bring this vision for the future into reality.

2.4.4 Long-Term Resident Members



Figure 2.4.6 - Resident-Member Responses

While the demographic of the NPU-L area contains an outstanding population of young adults, this age range is often not represented with regard to attendants of the monthly NPU-L meetings. Many attendants observed in these meetings are older and those who are often most vocal and inquisitive being individuals who would be described as

elderly due to their age. These individuals are often observed as being, outside the executive committee, the most consistent attendants to the monthly meetings and often report their attendance or hosting of additional and relevant community meetings throughout the English Avenue and Vine City neighborhoods. While they may not be associated to flow of information that would come from working in association with the city, the NPU, or a business in or outside the area, they are deeply informed by their long-standing residency within the area. These residents serve as informed experts on the operations of their neighborhood through observation and familiarity with the individuals that take up residence around them. These individuals tend to retain a historical recollection of projects, initiatives, and businesses that have existed throughout the NPU-L community and how the influence of both city-wide and neighborhood-specific influences have impacted the identity and character of their surroundings. This knowledge for how the community has progressed from their start of residency to present-day is often cited when giving their opinion or prefacing an inquiry they have about information being presented. It has been observed that in most instances these members are capable of establishing context for the rest of the general body with regard to the specific location being discussed and how the impact of that discussion will not only influence the area but the NPU as a whole. Though this projection is based on past observed experiences, the opinions voiced by these members are often a call to consideration for the implicit nuance that is not being considered by a simple review of the line items being presented in the agenda. As a result, these individuals are given respect not only for their age, but for their ability to provide insight and representation for the historical value held within the NPU-L area. In addition, long-term residents are often advocates for individuals who are not able to attend the

meetings and other individuals who, due to old age or lack of technical literacy, are not able to receive the information being present through online means. It has been observed on several occasions that the residents that have been located within the community for a time period exceeding the five-year range have been the most involved in wanting to understand the nature of the changes being proposed in the community and resisting any development of the area that would disenfranchise the current population from being able to continue their residence in an area they have lived in for years

2.5 Interview Insights and Recommendations

Over the course of this study, the context and implications of several individuals were cited to try and gain a better understanding of the NPU-L environment. Individuals whose expertise would help organize and define the information gathered through observation were paramount in helping understand the NPU setting as both an observant and participant. Ultimately, much like the information gathered through observation, the decision to remove personal information or details which could be later linked back to a particular person was done for the safety of those who provided insight. As a result, the information provided below serves as a synopsis for important themes and recommendations that were gathered through the content analysis of one-on-one interviews carried out throughout the study. The nature of this content analysis was deductive, where the predetermined framework for what information would be highlighted was relevant to the standard interview guide conducted with each participant. Individuals were informed of the objective of the entire thesis study, asked about their association to NPU-L through either residency or vocation, and then asked about the public claims made on the Westside of Atlanta relevant to gentrification through recent land-use development. These more

general questions were then followed up by a specific question about the capability and capacity for NPU-L to exist as a support to this publicized claim. Individuals who held elected office relevant to NPU-L, an occupation within city government as relevant to NPU-L, a long-term residency within the NPU-L area, and/or worked on a past or current initiative to help support NPU-L were consulted and asked to provide their insight and expertise to the study as it was being conducted. Of the interviews that were conducted, three areas relevant to the NPU-L space were highlighted through the multiple occurrences in which it was mentioned by interviewees. These became the area of interest for later analysis and the basis for design development, but were also used to help confirm the impact and relevancy of the information that had been collected in observations performed prior to the interview. Consequently, the participants of these interviews were not only interviewed once for the sake of validation of qualitative data collection, but consulted in later phases of development to ensure that their insight had been properly understood through the means upon which this knowledge was applied in later parts of the study.

2.5.1 The History of City Planning and the NPU System



Figure 2.5.1 – NPU Resource Mapping Document from 1976

The role of the City Planning Department within Atlanta's government has been vital in helping maintain the operation and structure of the Neighborhood Planning Unit (NPU) system. While not only providing information and insight to the unit of local residents, this department helps support the update of by-laws and services which ensure that the unit is able to operate autonomous from the city government structure while still being considered by departments that benefit from hearing the opinion of the neighborhoods they ultimately attempt to support. This relationship is outlined in detail within code of ordinance for the Atlanta City Council and the structure of the NPU system is integrated into the city charter as a means to protect the existence of this civil system. However, despite these attempts to preserve the structure and operation of this system, there are parts of this structure which are no longer present in the modern-day configuration of the NPU system. In particular, a review of documents managed by Atlanta's Department of City Planning reveals that there are documents that used to be managed, prepared and presented by residents or city planners; records of these documents are scarce and so a conclusion on when and why they ceased being produced was not able to be ascertained, beyond speculation provided by interview participants, over the course of this study. However, two documents of interest that were cited for their potential implications for how NPU systems could be served dated back to the 1970s. The first document, published in 1976, is titled "A Profile of NPU-L" and exists as a part of an initiative that catalogued each NPU. Within this document are several identical maps of the NPU-L geography which present overlays for how different agencies, resources, and departments exist within the area based on their specific location within the NPU. As explained in a letter from Maynard Jackson, the mayor of Atlanta during that time, the intent of this document was to document

what existed in the neighborhood at that time for the sake of the planning department and residents within this area. This information included neighborhood organizations, population and housing data, community services and facilities. As expressed in the letter, this documentation was prepared under the premise that it could be used as a valuable resource for community to manage and update their neighborhood plan.

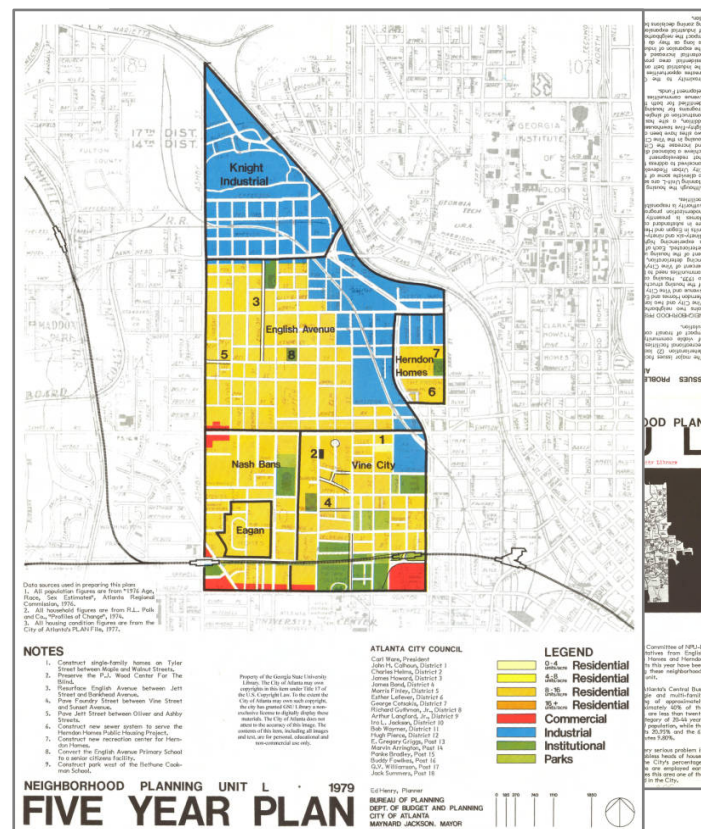


Figure 2.5.2 - NPU 5-Year Plan Map (1979)

One such instance of this plan comes from a document created in 1979, titled “Neighborhood Planning Unit L – Five Year Plan” which created a two-sided survey of NPU-L area. From what can be understood about this digital record, this document was constructed to not only document the current state of the NPU, but list out the specific goals and initiatives the residents and planning department would focus on going forward. On

one side of the document, which is divided into four sections, this document contains important information under headings titled “Issues, Problems, And Opportunities”, “Commercial Development”, “Environment”, “Urban Development an Neighborhood Preservation” and “Transportation”. The paragraphs which are displayed under each heading are illustrated on the other side of the document which provides a color-coded map of the NPU-L geography. Within the labelling of the communities highlighted through this document are number notations which can be referenced in a section entitled “Notes”; for each number listed in this footnotes section is an initiative relevant to the specific location within the NPU. This record of specific geographic location is imperative to understanding the detailed focus of the NPU and Atlanta City Government and serves as a powerful visual reference for individuals to quickly understand the interest of anyone associated with the planning of these communities. The visual elements which are present within this document cannot be traced to the modern day cataloguing of NPU relevant documents such as the latest Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP). In addition, unlike modern-day documents, this document provides specific areas and calls-to-action regarding where exactly the focus will be within NPU-L to promote improvement.

2.5.2 The History of Developers and NPU-L

The way that development has gone through the process of obtaining permission for re-zoning and land-use throughout the years has brought to residents within this area to have strong opinions about whether or not local developers are interested in helping preserve the identities of the community on the Westside. Many instances that were mentioned by participants being interviewed cited exchanges which confirmed information that had been expressed through observation: information on development projects are

often presented with concrete determinations on what this entity has decided as beneficial to the area. As a result, presentations to residents within the NPU setting are often made in hindsight of the planning process which leaves residents feeling as if they aren't included in the process of planning the look and identity of their own community. One participant referred to a prior experience in the past where they recalled a large-scale development project that did at least come and host engagement workshops where they inquired with residents about the type of facility they would want in the area being developed. This participant can specifically cite an exercise that was used during this workshop to highlight specific areas on the map with adhesive circles that noted not only where they wanted features of development but the types of features they felt would best serve their area. This occasion was described as an opportunity where, as a result of the inclusive activity, they felt as if they had contributed in a meaningful way and were anxious to see the result of this activity. However, the participant stated that this engagement happened over a year ago and since then they had received no word about how this information was actually considered in the planning of the project. It was observed, when this project came to provide an update, that no recollection or recall to this activity was even mentioned by the representatives present though the participant being interviewed was present at the time to ask them about how their input had been integrated into the planning process. As a result, many individuals who work in support of NPU-L as residents and officials are aware of the distrust and apprehension that many residents who have existed in the area for a long amount of time. A common fact that people working within or in association with NPU-L seem to acknowledge is the reputation that NPU-L has with regard to working with development. The NPU is known to be very resistant to new development projects while

also being vocal about their desire for new forms of support and equity within the community. While there was not a consistent justification amongst interviewees for why the NPU's attitude towards proposed development was or was not warranted, each occurrence that was cited spoke to the breakdown in communication that was previously observed through tracking the interactions that take place in monthly NPU-L meetings.

2.5.3 *The Importance of the Westside Land-Use Framework Plan*

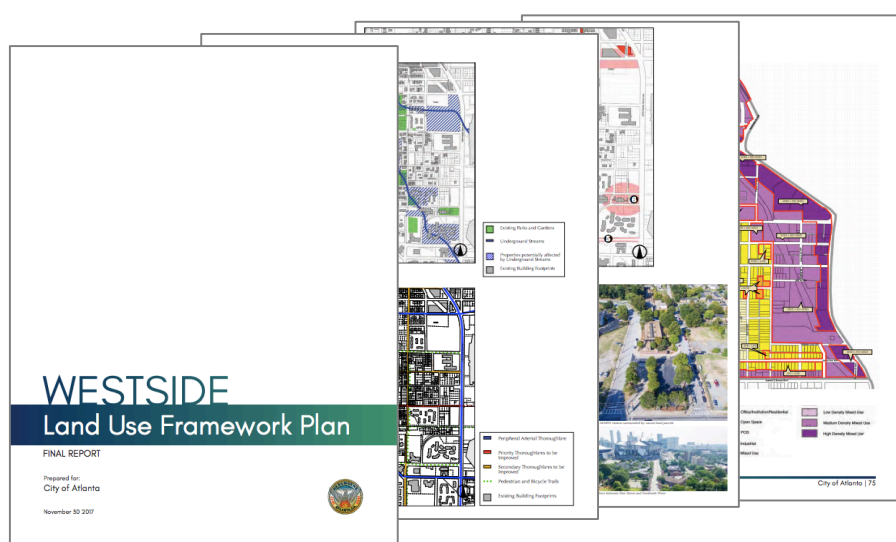


Figure 2.5.3 - Westside Land Use Framework Plan (2017)

With all of the instances that have been cited where entities have collected information from feedback in a way that resulted in a lack of cooperation and trust from residents, a commonly cited occurrence that holds a positive regard is the Westside Land-Use Framework Plan (WLFP). This comprehensive study was done over the Westside of Atlanta in reported in 2017, acting as the most recent accepted revision to the 2016 Comprehensive Development Plan. In an attempt to acknowledge the numerous studies that have been performed on this area, previous to this work, the studies provide all of the

recommendations that have been made within this area through table and visual overlays on a map of the Westside area. To create a basis for their work, the plan details the engagement work done within each area where the study was completed and how this information was sourced from research and neighborhood-input. Ultimately, the product of this study is a set of reports and visuals which extensively detail the recommend zoning and areas for additional focus that should be considered beneficial to the improvement of the Vine City and English Avenue neighborhood. This resource provides content that is both relevant to the social and economic interests of the neighborhoods where the study was performed and provides graphical representations for the vision of the community based on the infrastructure that existed at the time the study was performed. From the participants that cited this plan, there was no one who voiced opposition to this plan though some mentioned that they had not reviewed the plan. This was consistent with an observation where an NPU member had addressed the general body and inquired, through a show of hands, if any of the individuals present had read or reviewed the plan. The majority of individuals who were present during this observation did not raise their hand or verbally indicate that they had ever reviewed the contents of this document. This anecdote matches the recommendations made by interview participants that cite the WLFP as a “bible” with regard to the detailed recommendations it makes that the NPU could potentially follow in deciding on what projects can and would support the improvement of the NPU-L area. Within this document, there are recommendations for zoning allowances and which areas within the community should receive attention through repair, restoration, and additional means of support. While discussion about development projects that were observed did not receive heavy critique with regard to their adherence to this plan, there

was an instance where a member cited the plan as their reason for opposition to a matter being discussed in preparation for voting by the general body. While establishing a concrete evidence on whether residents of the NPU are in fact aware that this land-use framework plan exists and are interested in using it to police the nature of applications and projects which are proposed for this area was not determined through this study. However, through the discussion had with individuals about items that could support NPU-L, this was recommended as an important document upon which most individuals are familiar with the purpose and potential application of this document.

CHAPTER 3. A FOCUS ON NPU-L ARTIFACTS

Artifact Analysis is a process by which an artifact is placed as the central focus of observation as a means to understand the users and culture in which it regularly exists. By studying the material, aesthetic, and interactive qualities of the objects found within the NPU-L meeting space, it becomes possible to gather information about social contexts that exist during this monthly meeting and how these artifacts influence the meeting attendants that use them. The study of these artifacts will help provide qualitative information that can be further used to understand whether these physical artifacts support or hinder the civil discourse that occurs between the different individuals that are present during these monthly meetings.

3.1 Sign-In Sheet: Artifact used for Verification

The sign-in sheet for each NPU Monthly meeting is always located at the entrance of the venue where the meeting is held. The table upon which this stapled stack of 8.5 x 11 papers sits is often used as a place where additional announcements can be reviewed and picked up since most traffic at the entrance of the meeting flows through the interaction of attendants stopping to find their information on this sheet. This serves as the first point of interaction for most attendants entering the meeting, as all attendants are encouraged to record their information before finding a seat in the space. This monthly record is simple in construction and is often collected by the executive committee for review at the end of the meeting. This record not only allows for a record to be kept of individuals who attend the meeting, but also provides a means for the executive body to engage residents. Determination for residency is done after the meeting by a member of the executive board;

residents who provide their e-mail address are then able to be added to the e-mail list where NPU-L information is disseminated.

City of Atlanta Office of Planning

Month/Year: April 2023

Planner: Anthony Wilson

NPU-L SIGN-IN Attendance Sheet

Vine City Club Association Center
479 Joseph E. Brown Blvd., NW
Atlanta, GA 30314

Please print clearly

Total Members: 30

Name: JE Allen, III	Affiliation: <input type="checkbox"/> Resident <input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholder
Address: Atlanta, GA	
Phone: email:	Initials:
Name: Linda Adams	Affiliation: <input type="checkbox"/> Resident <input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholder
Address:	
Phone: email:	Initials: LA
Name: Baron Amos	Affiliation: <input type="checkbox"/> Resident <input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholder
Address:	
Phone: email:	Initials:
Name: Veronica Battle	Affiliation: <input type="checkbox"/> Resident <input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholder
Address:	
Phone: email:	Initials:
Name: Kelly Brown	Affiliation: <input type="checkbox"/> Resident <input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholder
Address:	
Phone: email:	Initials:

Page 1 of 22

Figure 3.1.1 - Sign-in Sheet for NPU-L Meetings

Aesthetically, this sheet is comprised of boxes and lines and does not graphically present as anything more than a text survey form. However, the interactive capacity of this form extends far past the small user interaction where an attendant decides to provide their name, address, and contact information. This record is kept for further review by the executive committee to establish whether a member is capable of voting at the end of the NPU calendar year and can be used as the basis for denying membership to an individual who may have falsified their qualifications as neighborhood resident despite their consistent attendance and familiarity with the neighborhood. Individuals who are not

residents, but qualify as stakeholders are given the opportunity to self-identify through this sheet, allowing for those reviewing the sheet to gain further understanding for the identity and association of the attendants and members that occupy the monthly meeting space.

3.2 Voting Paddles: Artifact used for Participant Communication

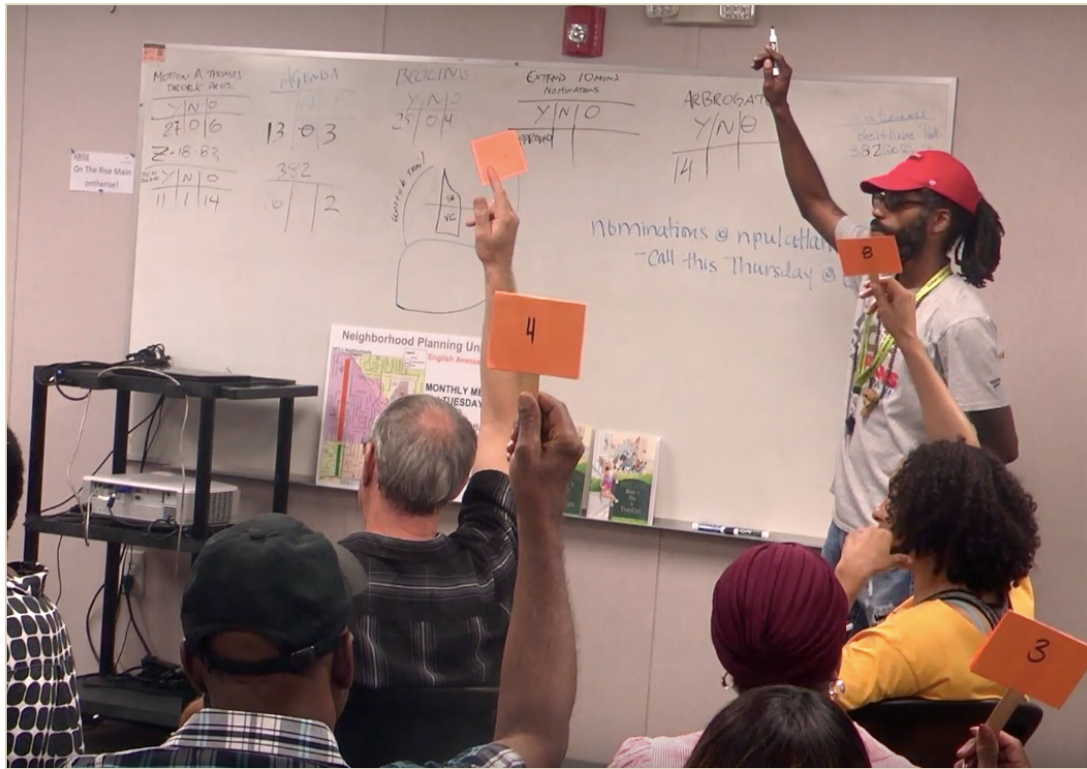


Figure 3.2.1 - Voting Paddles in Use (2018 NPU-L)

The most notable artifact that is used within the NPU-L are the voting paddles that are distributed to attendants that have been verified in previous meetings as qualifying for membership within NPU-L. When NPU-L meetings were being held during the 2018 calendar year, the construction of these paddles was made through colored sheets of paper which were adhered to a wooden paint stirrer. Though the construction of these artifacts was simple, they remained durable despite their re-use throughout the entire year; these

paddles were kept within manila envelopes and returned by members as they exited the meeting. Another consistent element of these paddles was the system of communication they helped support, especially with respect to their capacity to engage both verbal and non-verbal communication. In the same way that participants in an auction are equipped with paddles to get the attention of the facilitator, these paddles were used to signal and track the participation of members within an NPU meeting. These paddles were provided in two separate colors to account for the two neighborhoods that make up NPU-L. With each colored paddle a number was provided on it allowing for anyone aware of this system to track how many individuals from each neighborhood was present and if there were any notable trends that took place in regard to participation from these communities. In the process of voting the general body was often instructed to signal their support, opposition, or abstention from a voting matter through the use of these cards. Outside of voting, these paddles were often observed as being used in situations where a member was seeking permission to address a presenter or the general body. The only time that the use of this card did not support or supplement the explanation of a member's identity is in instances where a motion was being made or seconded by an individual whom the executive committee was unfamiliar with in full name. It should be noted that this artifact did not transition into the 2019 calendar year and was replaced by more traditional voting paddles which would be used during an auction. This version of voting paddles is closer to the traditional bid paddles used for auctions; this lightbulb-shaped, wooden artifact is painted dark-green with a rather smooth finish to the touch. While these paddles do retain a physical number that has been hand-printed onto the circular part of the device with the same type of paint used to cover the entire artifact, the lack of different colors does not provide the

same capacity as the 2018 counterpart. However, despite that difference, the operational capacity offered to members through their participation in voting and other civic features of the NPU monthly meeting are relatively identical.

3.3 Artifacts used for Discussion

3.3.1 Monthly Meeting Agenda

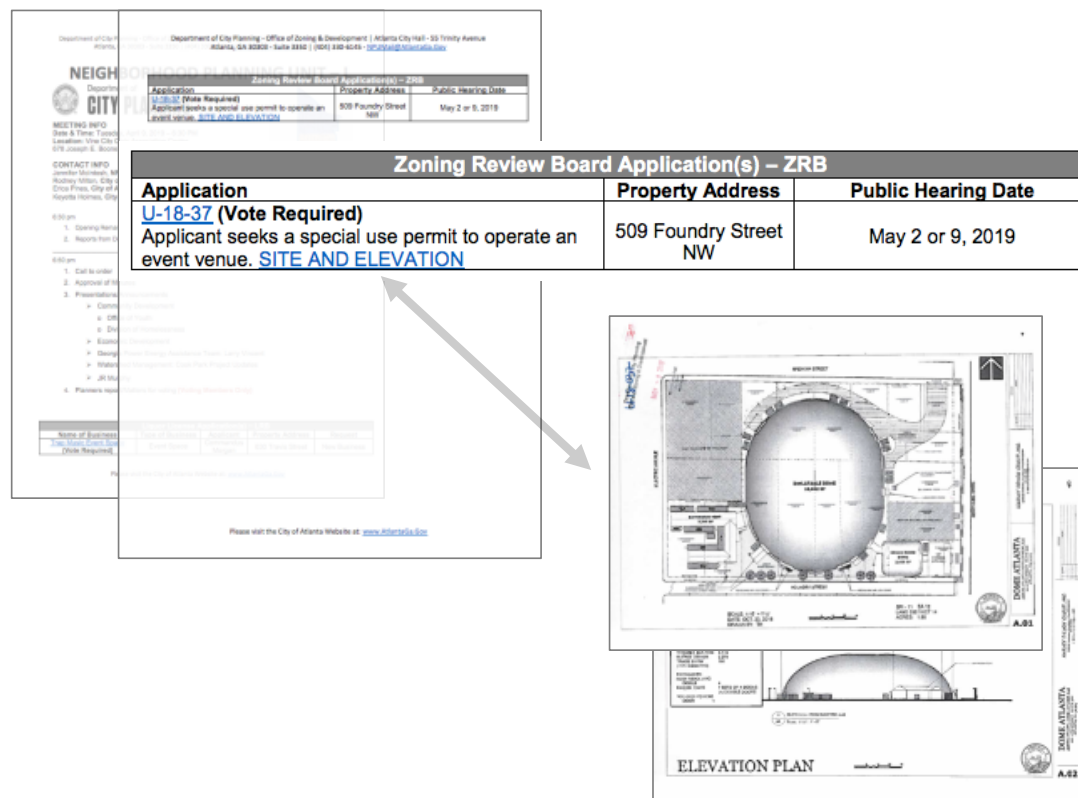


Figure 3.3.1 - Digital Capabilities of NPU Agenda

The use of the monthly meeting agenda is the most universal item referenced by attendants within the meeting. This item is constructed of 8.5x11 sheets of printer paper, which are distributed to all attendants upon entrance into the meeting either directly after signing-in or after finding an empty seat where an agenda has been placed. These sheets

which provide the meeting info and structure for the agenda are aesthetically consistent from meeting to meeting. While font choice is not consistent throughout the document, there is a clear distinction used in color choice: bold black is used to establish headings and titles, red is used to establish time limits and limits on participation from individuals who do not qualify as members, and blue is used to note information that possess additional capacity online. The use of this blue is extremely important as it provides insight into the nature of how these documents are prepared. After construction through the City Planning Department, these items are distributed to the Chairperson for the NPU as well as made available online. In this digital format, individuals are able to access additional content relevant to the line items which possess a hyperlink, denoted by the blue font color and underline style. These hyperlinks provide insight into the important information that provides information relevant to the submitted information an applicant or business was required to detail for consideration by the city. While this may include personal information of an applicant which could potentially cause an issue of safety and exposure of personal data, these hyperlinks also provide additional information relevant to the applicants site-plan, elevation plan, and other considerations that would be important to detail to the community upon which this request will impact. However, the physical, printed agenda within itself does not provide this additional information for participants to use as a reference. A reference that is provided, however, is a map which illustrates the streets and neighborhoods belong to the NPU-L boundary. This is often provided as the last page to the official agenda which is consistently printed and distributed every month. To complement this agenda, the 2019 agenda has included additional announcements and submitted applicant-information stapled to the back of the agenda. This was often observed

in the year prior as being information that was left out for individuals to pick up and review at their leisure in the event that it was provided for reference at all; the expressed intent of this decision to curate the information which accompanies the 2019 monthly agendas was to ensure that individuals would have the appropriate references required when a line item on the agenda was presented for discussion.

3.3.2 *Presentation Poster / Material*



Figure 3.3.2 - 3D Rendering and 2D Site Plan

The presence of presentation material, often supporting the explanation of a representative speaking in front of the NPU, possess a very apparent and inherent sense of politics. The construction of these materials varies in both size and content; individuals have been observed using large poster-board as well as smaller 8.5” x 11” sheets of paper to engage the general body in discussion. Though there were several instances where an individual approached their presentation with other material to present before the community, such as flyers, the presentation material relevant to a redevelopment project

held the most notable and unique response. In these instances, representatives for a project would approach the body with a visual medium which would allow them to display a site-plan or render of their project's future goal for development. In some instances, it was observed that this larger poster display would be accompanied by smaller handouts to give the body a means of reference and ensure that anyone whose line of sight was impeded could follow along with the material being distributed. Ultimately, the similarity between all of these instances where representatives came equipped with presentation information was the presenter's attempt to try and establish a clear understanding, through this illustration, of the project's intended goal. The design of this content was, as observed, intentional in trying to convey this goal so that it appeared as realistic as digital rendering software will allow. Consequently, this created two popular means for the presentation information to be displayed: the first being an illustration of the technical site plans and the second being a three-dimensional building façade that focused on the aesthetic of the building's exterior as well as the context it would have to the area upon which it was being constructed. While the former of these may require some knowledge to infer the implications of a two-dimensional blueprint for building construction, the rendering was always designed in a way that was nontechnical with regard to allowing an individual to immediately infer they were looking at, for instance, a building. As a result, these visuals granted presenters with the capability to speak about the projects intended construction, development, and operation upon completion. This capacity for speaking about the future-use of the project seemed to be the most important capability of this object as it was used as a reference within conversation to try and establish a shared sense of understanding between the presenter and the audience. However, this same intentionality which made

these visuals capable of complementing the presenter's explanation also held several common design decisions which, though seemingly standard amongst the official industry-standard renderings presented, were observed to draw critique from those in the audience. It should first be noted that the very nature of this artifact is for presentation through a method of reporting by the presenter with no opportunity to immediately edit or change any of the information being discussed after the representative's presentation. The visuals created are static and fixed to the poster board they've been adhered to. In addition, it should be noted that this document is also presented with a single-use of being a visual aid within the NPU meeting. For the meeting that the presenter feels it is relevant, this material is transported to the meeting venue and then removed from a more thorough review to the general body afterwards. As a result, this artifact is not dynamic, interactive, or immersive to the audience receiving it, especially if this is their first time being exposed to this information. This seemingly fixed perspective, which is an inference made through viewing of these future-use rendering posters, is mirrored in the allowances it affords the presenter to compare it to the present-use of the site; this was observed in several instances as an interesting moment for residents looking to inquire more about the impact of the development or provide a point of clarity to information being illustrated. While these site plans and renderings are seemingly effective in reporting the intentions of development projects for wanting to physically transform the area through construction, they often lacked context relevant to the definite socio-economic influence this project would have on the community. The material itself did not have any observable instructions for how viewers should interpret the information being presented which therefore led to several interpretations being presented to the representative for them to validate or deny. These

moments of visual sense-making were observed as being very vital to the course upon which conversation could take between the representative and members as well as the discussion had amongst members as they deliberated. As the only visual reference being offered within these discussions, resident-members found it upon themselves to try and adapt the intended use of these visual materials in ways that would try and help them discern how the expected goals of the project, shown through this rendering, aligned with current location of this proposed development and the current interest of the people who live relative to it. While these plans provided a visual reference of the immediate site of construction, surrounding information was only used to demonstrate the project's consideration for the development's final aesthetics and how it would match the context of the surrounding block of real-estate. From the discussion that was had through these visual artifacts, the interest of the audience was less focused on the very specific benefits being championed by this future development and more relevant to the information not being visualized: how the development would impact the current socio-economic considerations of those living there and, generally speaking, how the project would impact the NPU beyond the surrounding plots of land that border it; despite the impact and efficiency of visual presentation material to convey information which would be hard to otherwise describe, the visual itself did not come equipped with immediate ways to answer those specific inquiries.

3.4 Whiteboard: Artifacts used for Reporting / Recording

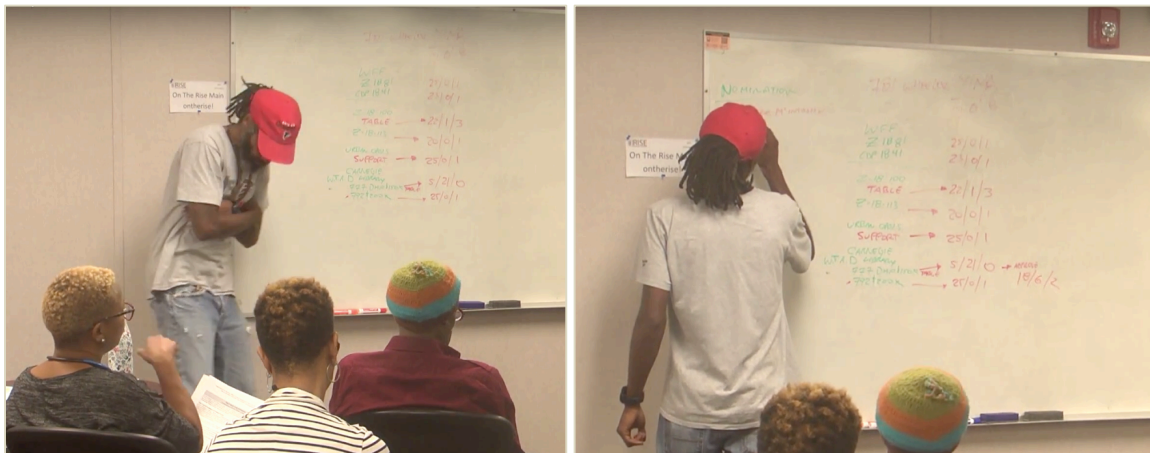


Figure 3.4.1 - Use of the White Board in 2018 NPU Meeting

Specific to the 2018 NPU-L calendar year, where ORFC was the meeting venue for monthly gatherings, the front of the room was established not only through the location of the executive board seating, but the whiteboard located on the wall adjacent to where the chairperson was located. This large dry-erase melamine board was mounted to the wall in an aluminum frame and was standard with regard to all the demonstrated features it offered over the course of the NPU meeting. However, these standard allowances were paramount to the way in which attendants oriented themselves in the meeting as well as understood the progress and presentation of information throughout the meeting. Though this board had the capacity to be used as a projecting screen, the use of the utility cart which held the laptop and projector in the room was never observed within use for this purpose. The most observed interaction this whiteboard received was through the reporting of individuals within the queue for upcoming reports and recording of votes made through the meeting. The whiteboard not only allowed the executive committee member to keep track of the

meeting's progress in real-time, through comparison between the agenda and the remaining presentations left on the board's queue, but gave a sense of transparency to the remaining attendants about the information that had been both presented and deliberated on. There were also several observed interactions where presenters were able to leave important information, such as methods for additional contact, on this display for the audience to note and interact with after the meeting. Because this was a shared resource, owned by the venue and often managed by a single individual throughout the meeting, an observed consideration for making sure it was not misused was consistent. The only noted adapted use observed was by individuals repurposing the aluminum tray at the bottom of the board, often used to hold dry-erase markers and erasers, as an easel to help support material being presented to the audience. This makeshift stand allowed for individuals to prop up reference material throughout their presentation and operate hands-free as they carried out their reporting. Ultimately, this artifact was observed as an important tool for the executive committee members as the helped facilitate the NPU-L meeting; the practice upon which this medium was used to help support the voting procedures, which take place in every meeting, are still performed during the 2019 meeting though there is no whiteboard within the venue. With the absence of this tool, information is recorded by hand from the front of the room by an executive committee member. Much like the process upon which the whiteboard supported in past meetings, this information is later transcribed and placed into the official meeting minutes of the NPU-L meeting which exists as public record for review by the city government. While the information being produced and recorded through newer meetings may remain accurate without the need for a whiteboard, the pencil-and-paper

format does not provide the sense of real-time reporting, reference, and transparency that its 2018 counterpart possessed.

CHAPTER 4. UNDERSTANDING THE NPU THROUGH DESIGN

Design presents the opportunity to implement visual, physical solutions in a particular environment with the intent of improving the current operation of said environment. With respect to the environment of NPU-L, several artifacts have been pre-identified as conduits for certain issues that pervade in the social interaction that happens during the flow of meetings. Ideally, by understanding the social implications being projected through these items, opportunities to introduce improvement can be recommended. The true impact of a design cannot be understood without measurement. The implementation of a design intervention is created and refined through an iterative test process. To gain an understanding on whether an intervention will have a positive or negative effect on the NPU-L environment, metrics and procedures must be established and tested. The act of testing and surveying residents and officials provides insight into the effectiveness of a design intervention. From this we can validate whether the assumed opportunity for design intervention was correct, understand the strengths and weaknesses found in the prototype, and generate insight on how to iterate further. This understanding will also create a basis to understand whether design truly can successfully empower residents in their understanding of development material.

4.1 Identified Areas for Design Focus

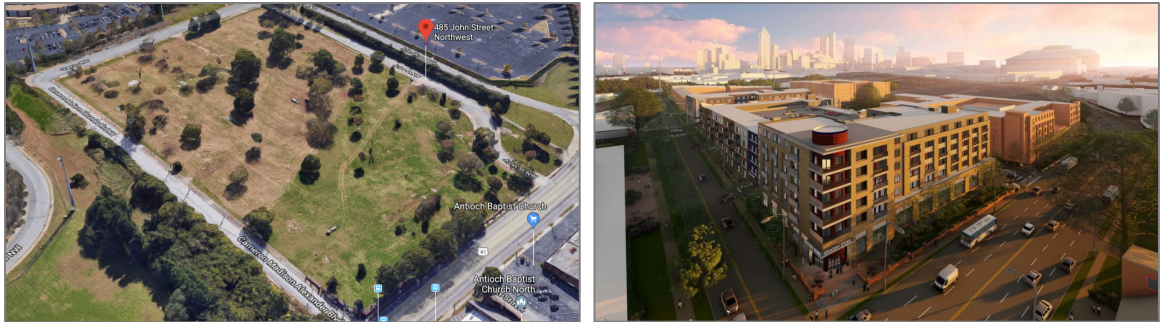


Figure 4.1.1 - Current State of Development (Left) and 3D Render of Future-State (Right)

4.1.1 *Sense-Making and Deliberation*

The monthly NPU-L meeting is a location where individuals from all over the Vine City and English Avenue geography congregate to gain information and make decisions on a number of items. As a result of the large amount of people that reside in these two neighborhoods, there would be no way that every resident would be able to attend these meetings. Even still, the population of the attendants to this meeting that are residents and stakeholders does span across these areas and bring people who can serve as representatives for streets, communities, and neighborhoods. With each area, there is a sub-culture that exists and is immediately shaped by the environmental factors which create the collective experience being represented by any one member. Each member of that collective experience is associated due to their place of residence and, as observed through demographic data and observation, could be the only item that is shared with someone in that same community. With that understanding, this presents a rich diversity of experience,

education, and insight which are always present in each NPU-L meeting. This consistency of diverse backgrounds is also met with the consistent guidelines which are used to dictate the operation of the meeting as well as the style of conduct the meeting follows: the NPU-L bylaws and Robert's Rules of Order. These two documents help give the meeting a foundation to create each agenda and encourage the body to transition from an audience receiving information, to an audience in discussion on the information being presented, to an audience making a decision on that same information all within a small window of time. While this process is performed several times within a meeting, it is not iterative in a way that allows for individuals to immediately retract their vote in the event that new information is suddenly presented. As a result, the presentation and deliberation on information is treated as being final; the recording of this vote will be reported to the relevant departments of city government who will consider this decision without any awareness for whether the individuals in this area truly felt informed or prepared to vote on a matter. This presents a large number of people with the task of collectively receiving information, for the first time and restrained to a time-limit, and being able to then demonstrate complete comprehension of this subject through participation in giving an official vote on that matter. While this, in theory, allows for the community to quickly deliberate on a large quantity of matters in a short amount of time it does not give opportunity for members to spend the time that would be necessary to research and become informed in the event they felt they were unqualified to make a decision. In many instances members have been observed approaching this apprehension with inquiry from the general body and initiating discussion to try and gain deeper insight on the underlying implications being reviewed by the NPU, but this has only proved to be successful if an individual

providing clarity is present and if that individual is accurate in the explanation they are providing. In some instances, such as discussion over NPU-specific bylaws, the difference of opinion on interpretation can present more confusion than clarity within the general body. In other instances, the desire for additional inquiry can be perceived as an attempt to undermine civil process or to make a personal attack on an individual which also impedes attempts for the general body to gain further insight on a particular topic. Ultimately, the small window of deliberation that is presented to the NPU has created moments where individuals have expressed their opposition to a proposed item being presented for consideration simply due to ambiguity that surrounded the explanation of the item. If the responsibility for presenting information to the NPU-L general body rests on the presenter of this information, then it would be of no fault for the NPU to display distrust in something they do adequately display clear, explicit interest in supporting their community. Ultimately, the basis for making decisions within this meeting space is often expressed as being limited for members unless insight is provided by a more informed party that happens to possess additional insight due to their proximity, association, or expertise on the topic being analysed in these moments.

4.1.2 Community Involvement and Identity

It has been observed that the instances where communication between attendants in the NPU setting have strayed from respectful, civil discourse are often proceeded by moments where information that has been presented for discussion did not provide members of the general body with enough information to feel informed about the requests, proposal, or project's intent. In these instances, members are vocal about their feelings of frustration and have been observed in these instances as citing their fear of being

disenfranchised as a result of this ambiguity. This frustration is only further exacerbated by moments in which reports are made to the general body in a way that does not create opportunity for residents to provide actual input by way of further involvement by the general body or engagement by the presenter (often a representative of a corporation, agency, or institution). The report of how an individual is claiming to service an area within the NPU is often met with inquiry from the general body on where evidence of that involvement or engagement has taken place. In most of the instances observed, representatives who have claimed to engage the community have either done so through meetings that members express they had no knowledge of, due to the lack of information provided through the NPU-L system, or their most recent act of engagement is the report they are currently making to the NPU. Furthermore, the inquiry of the general body is often made to representatives through the critique of the benefits being proposed through the project they are presenting. Members of the NPU have been explicit about inquiring about the identity of the audience being imagined for the presentation being made and have cited the interest and concerns of the community as a basis for assuming the presentation being made is not in their best interest. This conclusion is often complemented by residents listing their concerns for affordability, living wage, employment opportunities, improvements to current quality of life, and resident retention as some of their major concerns. While citing this miss-match in their concerns and the benefits being presented by a presentation is not enough to indict the corporation the representative is presenting on behalf of, this grievance is often observed as a complement to the larger issue that residents feel they are expressing during these discussions with representatives; in the best instances, large development projects have come in the early stages of planning to try and engage the community and

cite their interest and feedback but in most cases, the inclusion of comprehensive community feedback is not offered through the NPU meeting setting. This reporting on behalf of this development project, which is coming from the individuals in executive positions of decision-making for how areas in the community will be shaped, reaches the community after physical changes have already been made to the community. Based on the future-vision being presented to the community and the lack of flexibility often expressed by presenters within these meetings, members of the NPU feel as if they are not given the proper avenues, resources, or opportunities to ensure that their current concerns are being facilitated by projects in the neighborhood so that they can ultimately remain a part of the future-vision for the neighborhood planning unit.

4.1.3 One Dialogue, Two Conversations

The most contentious dynamic which has been observed in monthly NPU meetings has been between members of the NPU and individuals who hold association to an entity which does not immediately support the concerns of the NPU but looks to provide a business or service in that area. In the instances where local residents within NPU-L are seeking to learn and participate through the civil structure of discussion and deliberation on local matters, the way in which representatives often respond is through leveraging their knowledge as a sense of authority. This observed attempt to assume the role of authoritarian and expert on the information being presented is similar to the interaction described by Paulo Fierre as the “banking concept of education”; the act of education exists as a one-sided deposit of information upon which the representative has assumed the notion that they are knowledgeable and their insight into the intent and progress of the project serves as the standard for insight and awareness of the project (Freire, 1993). Consequently, this

not only creates demarcation for individuals who are perceived as being knowledgeable and those who are not, but also creates a group of people who are being included and those who are being disenfranchised from consideration when this knowledge is being formed. In contrast, this is one of the few instances where observed within the NPU meeting where knowledge is solely defined through this concept and the act of becoming educated in this environment is not sought after through a process of inquiry; in most instances, while individuals within the NPU are offering an inquiry about a particular nuance being presented, it is not an observed action of them assuming the quintessential student role as expressed in Freire's teacher-student relationship (Freire, 1993). In fact, resident members of the NPU-L are fully aware that they are actually extremely knowledgeable on the topic through their lived experience and association to the geography being discussed. As expressed within conversations had with representatives, many of these individuals are fully aware of how projects within their area have been progressing because they are either, in a best-case scenario, able immediately observe it from afar as they move within their neighborhood or, worst case scenario, immediately impacted by this project's progress due to the impediments that are created in their daily life due to the construction that is taking place. The conversation that is looked to be initiated through inquiry, from the members to the representative, looks to acknowledge that members are aware of their knowledge and power as an neighborhood planning unit which can resist the interest of the entities presenting within this meeting. In inquiring about opportunity for involvement or consideration of their NPU-specific concerns by representatives, resident-members of this civil structure are not only demonstrating the value of their local, contextual knowledge and experience but also establishing their importance as educators to the people that

endeavour to work on the projects being proposed. These opportunities, where residents are presenting a problem for consideration through the discussion being held within meetings, could be considered as moments where both parties could be given the opportunity to try and acclimate to each other's differing perspectives with the understanding that both have valuable insight to offer the other. While this observed instance does inherently possess a possibility for collective-problem solving, where both the representative and resident acknowledge each other's knowledge and expertise, but that has not been observed to this point. What has been observed, however, is the response to an inquiry from residents being met with a reply that does not involve the resident in the process of gaining more insight or developing solutions (i.e. "I'm not sure, we will have to consult with the person assigned to that detail, but we will make sure to get back with you once we know more." or "That issue is considered by a different department, group, or project. Since it is not our immediate responsibility you will have to consult with them.>"). While this may be a truthful response, it does not create an opportunity for participation and involvement which are frequent interactions observed through other parts of the NPU meeting. Whether or not resident participation is welcomed by the projects that representatives are presenting on is not a conclusion that can be made through this observation. However, it should be noted that the contention that exists in these conversations, which is used to make accusations about the unwillingness of both parties to have a productive exchange is observed in how these parties look for understanding through the common terms being used. Representatives often justify the decisions made on a project through the commonly used lexicon within their industry and within city government. These terms hold a certain sense of politics to them which can imply the idea

that the entity using them is being mindful of their environment. However, for residents, these terms do not always accurately track to their concerns and are often times used as a way to distract from a deeper issue they feel is not being considered or addressed. This is most commonly observed in instances where terms such as “affordable housing”, “average median income (AMI)”, “living wage”, or “additional employment opportunities” are being used. For residents of Vine City and English Avenue, the measure of income, a living wage made by the city does not meet the geographic-specific definition of their neighborhoods. In addition, affordability or employment opportunities that have been proposed in the past have been assessed by the residents who attend NPU meetings and considered as being inconsistent with the original benefit that was stated. As a result, inquiry made by resident-members is an intentional way to evaluate the understanding that entities outside of their planning unit have on these terms and help educate them on how their definition changes within the context of individuals living in an area where those ideas are not figurative or abstract.

4.2 Design Scope



Figure 4.2.1 - Current State of Land (Top) and 3D Render of Project Proposal (Bottom)

The environment of the NPU-L meeting provides a diverse set of interactions which could be explored through the implementation of a designed artifact. In a space where so many interactions are impacted by the construction of the space, the format of the meeting, and the tools that are used to help support this civic process, there are a large number of opportunities which could be approached. While the interest of this study was to understand the areas upon which design could help support residents act of resistance, this within itself does not limit the number of areas upon which a design solution could be proposed. As a result, the scale and scope of this ongoing design process was made specific to the most notable interaction that not only characterizes the original, historical intent of the NPU environment but also serves as the most noteworthy interaction observed and understood through prior ethnographic study: the discussions had between the resident-member and the development representative about proposed development projects. From the perspective of the artifacts assigned to each of these individuals within the NPU-meeting space, a strong contrast is created which presents an interesting opportunity for design exploration; residents looking for more context on how these future-use projects will impact the current state of their community are not equipped with the same visual sense-making devices as their development-representative counterpart who is able to represent the neighborhood's land based on his interests. Without having to take consideration for the current-state or desires of those who live in proximity to this site, the developer has the ability to propose a section of the community completely out-of-context to the geographical or spatial importance it currently possess to resident's desires for affordability, increased financial opportunity, and cultural identity. The intentionality in presenting these visual renders allows for a representative, within the very moment they present this material, the

opportunity to completely re-contextualize apart of a community in a way that may not reflect the current or future interest of the very residents that live on or adjacent to that development site. This capacity, offered to the presenter through the visual nature of their material, helps perpetuate the perceived lack of consideration and attention to which development projects have been historically accused of operating under, especially with regard to the residents of NPU-L. Within this interaction, the area upon which this imbalance receives the most support is relevant to the presence or lack of visual display. While this community of individuals looks to establish context, clarity, discern impact, and signal to the larger society about the issues relevant to their geography, it does not currently have an artifact which helps residents relay this interest through a visual medium. While this is relevant to the current format of the operation and meeting space of present-day NPU-L, this lack has not been historically consistent. With the uncovering of historical resource-mapping documents which were used within the original neighborhood planning unit, a clear foundation for the structure and importance for documents like this serve as strong basis for design exploration. Beyond that, the existence of documents with information, provided through the visual display of information on a series of identical neighborhood maps, as recent as the Westside Land-Use Framework Plan, help ground some of the historical concerns, from when these documents were in use, in a modern-day contemplation for how the community would like to establish a visual catalog of its identity, values, and interests. With these notions in mind, the premise for this design exploration settled into an inquiry about, in the event these aforementioned elements of visual-information-design could be formed into a designed prototype, could they give the residents a means to not only catalog their current-state and goals for the community but

also use this community-sourced interests to serve as a measuring-device for the positive or negative impact a proposed development could have on the community upon construction. Ideally, by equipping the community with a toolkit to use during their interactions with developers, they could counteract the need for development material to be informative or objective and immediately assess the information in context to their entire community as well as the specific concerns current residents have with regard to being displaced from their homes. While this proposed design exploration could not explicitly grant the opportunity to empower residents in resisting all proposals for development requests in NPU-L or suddenly provide them with technical expertise to immediately infer the full impact a development will have, it does provide a very an opportunity to not only encourage resident-sourced visual documents but for them to use these visual documents as means to bring awareness to those looking to develop within the community without resistance.

4.3 Design Prototype



Figure 4.3.1 - NPU-L Resident Assessment Map Prototype (Full)

The preliminary product crafted within this part of the thesis study served as a visual measure and reflection of the information relevant to the NPU-L geography. While looking to visualize the spatial and geographical dimensions of the area, this layout attempts to create an objective layout of several English Avenue and Vine City factors which would also allow residents to understand the social implications of placing any new project within this boundary. The information used to help illustrate this work is taken from Atlanta City Planning department documents, 2016 Comprehensive Development Plan, census data, the

Westside Land-Use Framework Plan, 2018 InvestAtlanta, real-estate market data and definitions to important terms and topics which had been highlighted as relevant to the NPU-L general body via prior observation and interviews. Collectively, visualizing all of these documents onto one physical, interactive object is the overarching premise for what is tentatively being referred to as the “NPU-L Resident Assessment Tool” (NRAT). To match the context of the NPU-L environment, which does not use any digital mediums for conducting the monthly meetings, this version of the prototype assumed the most common sense of materiality found within the meeting environment; to embody the physical interactive features of using a map, the construction of this tool was presented in an accordion folded document which contained eight panels.

The features of this prototype are divided into three main areas of importance which are to be used in conjunction with one another; it should be noted that this device, to be used effectively, holds the assumption that it's being used as a means to quickly discern the spatial and geographical relevancy of a development proposal's two-dimensional or three-dimensional information. While this could essentially be used in several different contexts, the scope that was set initial to the design of this object served as the foundation for imagining the operation of this tool. Within the inside is the summary of this intended use-case, which details the interest of helping improve the quality of discourse held between residents and developers during meetings and hopefully generate relevant inquiry about the current and future-state of the community. This is then followed by an explicit set of instructions which require the user of this mapping tool to self-identify and establish a very personal context for the development being discussed; the start of navigating this mapping tool is the request for users to begin by mapping their location on the provided map. Upon doing so, the user is instructed to locate the proposed development and then note its relationship to their residence as well as additional mapped or un-mapped points of interest. A point of interaction is made for users to provide data to the graph as a means of active assessment and deliberation on material that was either passively inferred through conversation or explicitly requested from development representatives through the brief time provided for resident-development conversation. The additional area provided within the interior of this prototype is dedicated to the display and discernment of a map which displays information relevant to the NPU-L geography. The decision of what to map comes from the information detailed in past documents which explicitly note NPU-L's interest in historic perseveration, the addition of more greenspace, the reduction of storm-water

management issues, increased amount of employment which pays a minimum wage, the area's average median income, transportation, and incoming development projects which have already received approval from the city to begin development within the English Avenue and Vine City area. This style of visual sense-making is designed in a way to implicitly present information which helps understand the size and proximity of these projects as they relate to the bigger picture. The more explicit components of this device come through the exterior of this accordion folded mapping document, where the document comes equipped with a check-list. This list is comprised of shortened statements which are designed to embody the expressed values the community has established in the past as tenets to the support and progress of NPU-L. As a result, the interest of this feature was to immediately confront users with an interaction that required them to quickly consider the socio-economic implications that this project offer, not in relationship to the benefits they've touted to describe through presentation, well before any ground is broken on development. The last amount of real-estate left from these other two features, the NRAT comes with a section for notes; with the assumed use-case scenario being for a resident looking to quickly discern the visual documents being presented, the inclusion of a space where residents could store relevant inquiry and discovery that was generated from the exercise of using this tool.

4.4 Methodology for Testing

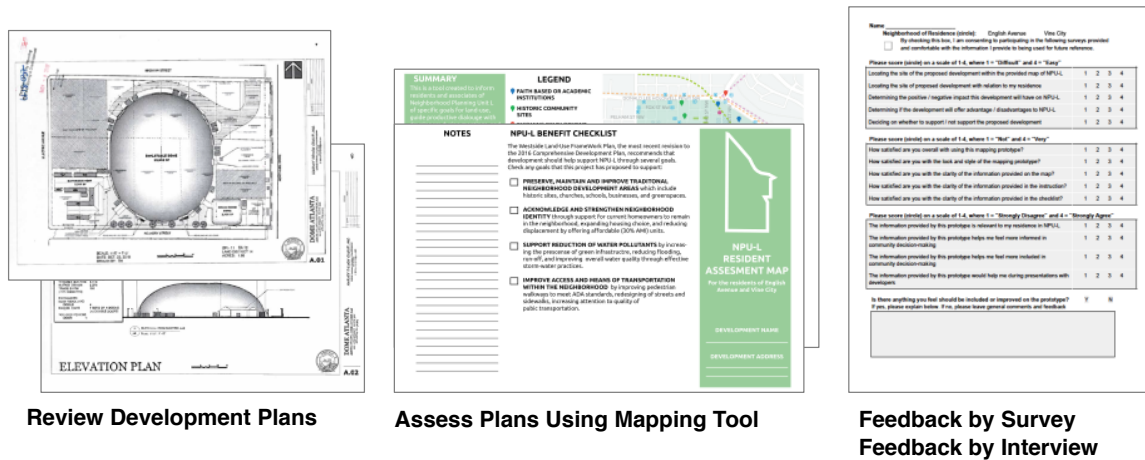


Figure 4.4.1 - Overview of Prototype Testing Strategy

To understand if the intended use-case of this object was meaningful or relevant to the proposed area of design opportunity, testing was designed to collect feedback on the effectiveness of the device, satisfaction users had with the device, and if individuals felt that the product held an element of inclusion to the way upon which it was designed. To expound, the construct of effectiveness was defined as whether the prototype was capable of helping the user discern the location of the proposed development within the NPU-L boundary later but also within proximity to their residence and livelihood. Additional consideration was given to the possibility that individuals within this user-group, after receiving this geographical context, could start to form an opinion on how they felt about the proposed development. The construct for satisfaction was defined through the consideration for whether users of this prototype found the graphical design of this object to be aesthetically pleasing and if the information design of each element was clear to understand. Lastly, as an important consideration for the NPU's observed interest with resident-development-interaction, the surveying of this product included a more abstract

construct related to the inclusion or enfranchisement of resident-users. As the target audience for this device, knowing whether the document produced any sense of support and benefit to the way that residents have expressed their interest in community involvement was paramount. As a result, this construct looked to gauge whether the tool held the capability of providing the user with a sense that their interests were being reflected in the prototype. To assess this construct for its relevancy to the resident-members of the NPU-L environment, a testing scenario was designed and deployed to collect evidence about the impact a developed an object like this might have in a real NPU scenario where residents must quickly perform the act of visual sense-making. The simulation of this exercise, where residents would be presented with visual development project material and asked to immediately determine information not provided within the documents, was intended to be as close to realistic as possible. To effectively replicate this, the survey document distributed for testing was preceded by an exercise of resident-users being given a sample of a local, NPU-L relevant site-plan. Using this site and elevation plan, users are requested to discern any information about the plan which may or may not be visually exclaimed. Upon being exposed to this visual document, users are then equipped with the assessment-mapping prototype. Upon full review and interaction with the prototype, users were provided with a physical survey to collect quantitative data and the opportunity to follow-up through a short, qualitative interview guided by the same constructs used to survey; the design of the interview guide was constructed as a way to verify the constructs tested through survey as well as gain more insight into the credibility of the users engaging with the assessment material. The survey itself was fifteen questions assessed using a four-point Likert scale which encouraged users to align themselves in

agreement or disagreement with the statements being expressed with each survey-prompt section. At the request of individuals who were engaged over the course of the survey process, an online version of this quantitative survey was made and individuals were given the opportunity to be engaged at a later time through phone interview if they opted to be contacted after completion of the survey.

4.5 Testing of the Prototype

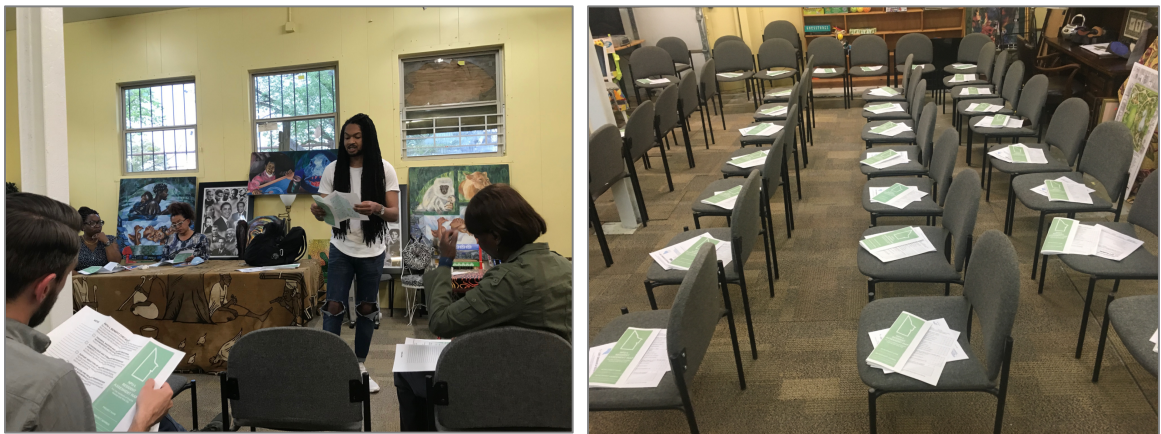


Figure 4.5.1 - Presentation of Prototype and Integration into NPU Meeting

Deployment of this testing phase came in three rounds which received limited engagement. A month prior to the deployment of this prototype and survey, an informal introduction of the thesis study was made before the general body during an official NPU monthly meeting. Upon disclosure of the thesis study's focus and intent, participants were recruited for the study amongst members of the general body. Following this, the prototype and survey were debuted to the general body at an NPU-L Informational Meeting. Informational meetings, which are a new extension of the official NPU-L meetings being performed within the 2019 NPU meeting schedule, are designed to offer an extended opportunity for residents to engage with presenters within the NPU in a less time-restricted

format so that more discussion and discernment can be carried out. These meetings are held on the first Wednesday of every month, which precedes the regular NPU-L meetings which take place on every second Tuesday of the month. Despite the offering of this less time-sensitive format, attendance to this meeting was low and therefore impacted the number of individuals present for the introduction of this prototype. Of those in attendance, two resident-members provided completed surveys and qualitative interviews were conducted by three members. Following this event, an invitation was extended from the NPU Chairperson to integrate the prototype into the general conduct and operation of the next official NPU-L meeting. Included within the agenda of this meeting, due to the applications being submitted to this city for operation, was a site and elevation plan for a location within the NPU-L environment. Ideally, this opportunity created an ideal opportunity for residents to test the effectiveness of this prototype through a real-world application. In addition, the inclusion of this prototype would give the first observable instance upon which representatives of a development project would be exposed, and thereby introduced, to a NPU-sourced artifact to serve as a counterpart to their visual presentation material. However, despite this ideal circumstance, this proposed testing opportunity was not able to be performed due to the applicant of this project was not present at the meeting. Despite this barrier to testing, two individuals completed the survey and qualitative feedback was collected from three additional resident-members. To meet prior requests for an online format, an online phase was offered to residents which was made available to them through the NPU Chairperson periodically dispersing the content through the NPU-wide e-mail list. From this means of engagement, three additional quantitative surveys were completed and complemented with a single qualitative interview.

4.6 Feedback from Testing



Figure 4.6.1 - Feedback Mapped to Corresponding Feature of Prototype

Though the observed number of regular attendants to monthly NPU meetings would average around thirty individuals, which would make the number of participants who engaged in the testing process appear to be a stronger representation of the resident-members being targeted by the survey, overall engagement was relatively low. As a result, the strength of the feedback received came more from the qualitative information provided by residents more so than the small number of survey participants. This, however, is not exclaimed as means to discredit the results of this survey which did happen to highlight two important areas of feedback: the helpfulness of the map and the interaction point of having individuals create personal context on the prototype through an analog mapping practice. While the majority of individuals felt that the prototype helped residents locate development within the NPU-L geography, they did not feel that it gave them any advantages in being able to immediately determine whether the development would have a positive or negative impact. Secondly, residents voiced a strong sense of satisfaction,

inclusion and feeling informed as it related to the visual information provided. However, outside of the map, residents did not feel satisfied with the construction of the map or the instructions. Their specific interest for these elements of the prototype were better communicated through the qualitative information collected throughout the process. Participants cited the desire to have the inclusion of more visual elements to both features of the prototype with the specific addition of retail development being a consideration specified in the check-list. Overall, participants placed the largest amount of consideration into the presentation of information as it related or supported the visual data represented on the map. To help complement the act of using the map for reference and assessment, requests to make the map less technical and present with icons and land-marks was an important piece of feedback received by several resident-members. Another important and common note was the request for more labeling of landmarks, green-spaces, and incoming development project information. Overall, the sentiment expressed both qualitatively and quantitatively suggested that a larger prototype which provided additional context, through the inclusion of more contextual visuals and text-based information would be well received.

4.7 Additional Feedback

Outside of resident-member feedback, this study and prototype received notable feedback from individuals who served as advisors throughout the study, recruited for their expertise for community engagement, design, and understanding of the intended social-impact premise of this thesis project. These individuals, who have provided insight and feedback throughout the course of this study, provided an additional level of awareness for how the design of this prototype should be considered in further development. Interestingly enough, several of the suggestions made on behalf of the resident-members were identical to the feedback that was received prior from the members themselves. This included a recommendation for the removal of the AMI shaded region on the map, which did not create any visual significance for the way in which people perceived the affordability of the area as a result of the entire area having an identical value. In addition, the way upon which information was visually displayed on the map with regard to the realistic geographic and spatial identity was echoed though in different sentiments; residents desire to have more inclusion of landmarks and a nontechnical aesthetic would allow for more consideration to be given to how assets and resources, such as historical sites or academic institutions, were represented with regard to their actual size and scale within the area. Similarly, the call for a larger medium was not only voiced by residents but advisors alike; the accordion fold not only confused the way that users interacted with information located on the front and back of the paper, but a format which would allow for more information to be placed in consecutive, side-by-side flow would've facilitated some of the additional sense-making features which resident-members requested in the later development.

CHAPTER 5. FUTURE STEPS FOR NPU-L DESIGN WORK

The conclusion of this research and study merely serves as the foundation for additional design research and ideation. The intentional and specific scope of this study provided a means to suggest positive social-impact on a microcosm of a large, systematic issue. As a result, it should be understood what conclusions from this work could and could not be easily translated to a larger scale or similar community. With that same consideration, there are additional measures that should be taken in the future to ensure that this introductory study can provide even more concrete evidence to substantiate the recommendations presented through this study.

5.1 Future Design Considerations

Through the course of this design exploration a number of new considerations have arisen for how this thesis study, and resulting product, should be addressed in helping assist residents within the NPU environment. While some of these present the opportunity for this project to serve as the foundation for many other forms of design exploration, most of the implications that can be made from this study are relevant to the constant cost-benefit balance that comes with managing the projected impact and real-world implementation of a designed object. Though the majority of these considerations currently exist as theoretical concerns, it's imperative that these notions be explored pre-emptively so that the eventually integration of this design exploration is intentional and impactful.

As this prototype exists, it possesses features that make it both compact and multifaceted with regard to the ways information is presented and interacted with by the

resident-user. However, it should be considered that other individuals outside of the immediate NPU-L community may be encouraged to use this tool. Even if the spatial and geographical context of this tool remains specific to the English Avenue and Vine City neighborhoods, it may be important to explore how the identity a non-resident user impacts the way upon which clarity and context is understood. If this tool is intended to exist as a visual display then the intended audience for this information should be broad enough that it creates a comprehensive display and understanding of the NPU-L neighborhoods but contain elements which can be universally understood by outside entities such as the development that are present in NPU meetings. Beyond the concern for how information within this prototype should be displayed to help create a universal understanding, the concern for the format upon which this content should be displayed provides another important place of further development. There are notable benefits to creating this prototype as separate artifacts to be designed and individually developed; the use of a small portable pamphlet, a large-scale map, and an informational text-reference book. However, even still, there is even more opportunity to explore the potential impact of this project through another means: by limiting the amount of information displayed on the prototype and increasing the points of interaction where users implement additional analog mapping strategies, this simple information design has the ability to become developed into a service design project for sourcing community perspective on a number of neighborhood-relevant issues. Similarly, this inquiry on how the content, scale, and responsibility of the community to support the development of this product brings up the sustainability of any proposed design solutions. To integrate an item of this nature into a community environment, where individuals already volunteer their time and resources, the need for

scaffolding a project like this presents the potential concern of overburdening a group of people now responsible for creating visual media which they may not possess the interest, know-how or expertise.

5.2 Reflection

The original premise for pursuing this thesis topic was to create a means upon which design could be applied to a topic which was not only complex, rarely approached through this discipline, but held particular relevancy to minority populations. It was my belief that minority groups, much like low-income African American communities within NPU-L, were in part victim to disregard which informs design sentiments like “Design for the other 90%”. I believed, much like I still do today, that there are local areas within America which lack the appropriate support and service to help communities in need. With the design community existing as a microcosm within the greater society, it was my interest to use the power of design to amplify the protest of the residents in my neighborhood, believing that design’s capacity to engage broad audiences could be made immediately relevant to resident’s resistance to displacement from gentrification. However, this anxious search for ways to engage the greater Atlanta audience in discourse on gentrification of the Westside did not come in the form of critical design theory or an act of advocacy through the development of artifacts which held explicit anti-gentrification politics. In hindsight, the development of my original premise would’ve been reductive not only to in-depth system-level of thinking necessary to try and conceptualize a largely non-physical process like gentrification into designed artifacts but would’ve been an oversimplification of the conditions which inform the protest of Westside residents. The evolution of my awareness came in one part as a result of my extensive time observing the NPU space but also in the

reminder that I belonged to the environment upon which I was observing. As someone who exists within the majority-renter community of English Avenue, the incoming expansion of Beltline-associated development will run through my residence. With very little protection in place to protect my interest in remaining within the area, the idea of how to create support became more important than how to bring attention; the evidence and effect of gentrification are not hidden nor without critique. In addition, the interest that fueled my original exploration spoke to the difficult relationship between designing to support a population and the resulting value inserted into the area by design makes the population vulnerable to gentrification; this initial path through critical design was not structured to provide any alternative to maneuvering this conundrum. However, it was my time spent observing and becoming engaged with my community that allowed me to become aware of my current foray within information and service design. The most transformative part of this process came through the constant challenge of having to adjust the scale and scope upon which my design project focused on. In establishing a focus on the NPU environment I thought I'd reached the foundation for my design exploration, however the nuance relevant to scaling my focus down to the resident-development interaction was what ultimately lead me to consider the toolkit which is currently being developed. The other factor which has played a large part in shifting my perspective in addition to scale is the temporal and spatial considerations which exist in how a problem is approached. The process of gentrification not only impacts the spatial identity of an area, but helps transform the social and historical context that it once possessed. Ultimately, it became apparent that the act of resistance that residents discuss in greater detail is not a barring of external forces impacting the area, but the establishment of present-day, community sourced assets that

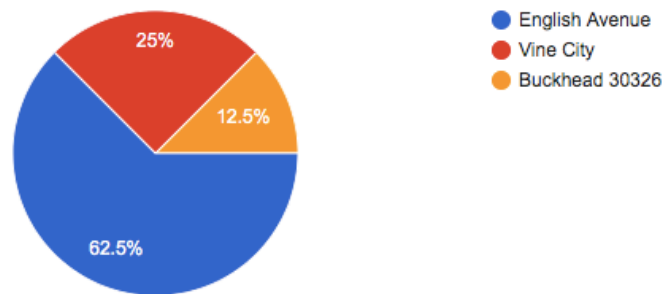
allow them to negotiate with these entities as equals. The documentation and display of assets is not only an exploration in asset mapping, but through information and service design, giving a community the awareness of how to leverage their unique identity to derive ownership and agency from within their geographic boundary.

APPENDIX A. QUANTITATIVE TESTING RESULTS

The following information has been sourced from the Google Forms Survey distributed through the NPU-L mailing list, made available for resident-members and stakeholders of the Neighborhood Planning Unit.

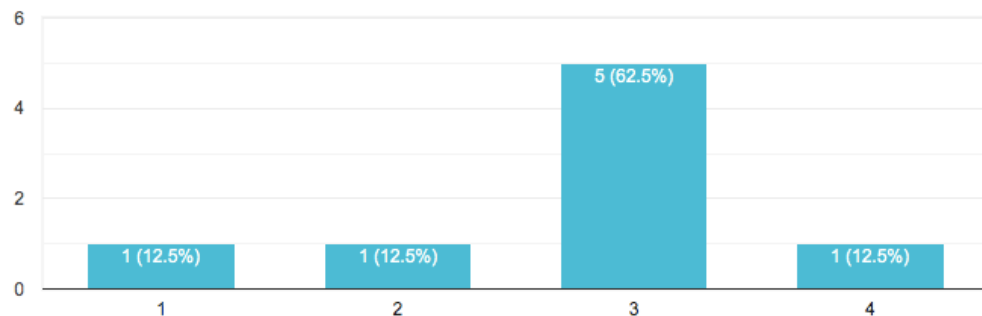
Neighborhood of Residence

8 responses



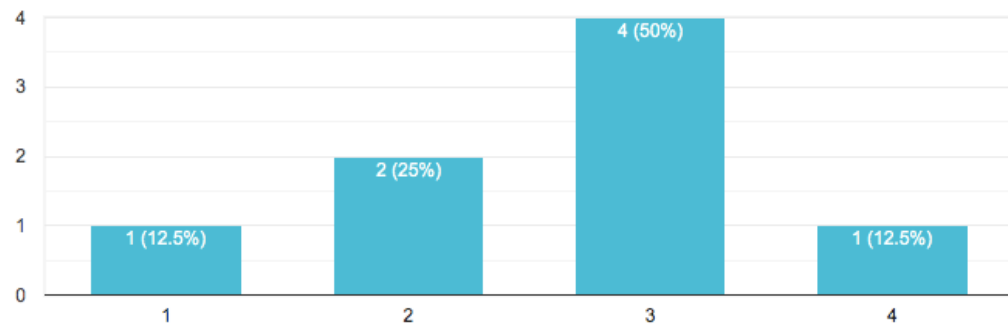
Locating the site of the proposed development within the provided map of NPU-L

8 responses



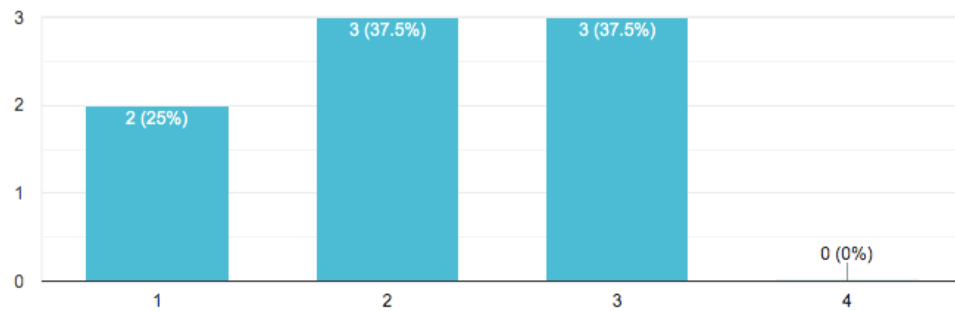
Locating the site of proposed development with relation to my residence

8 responses



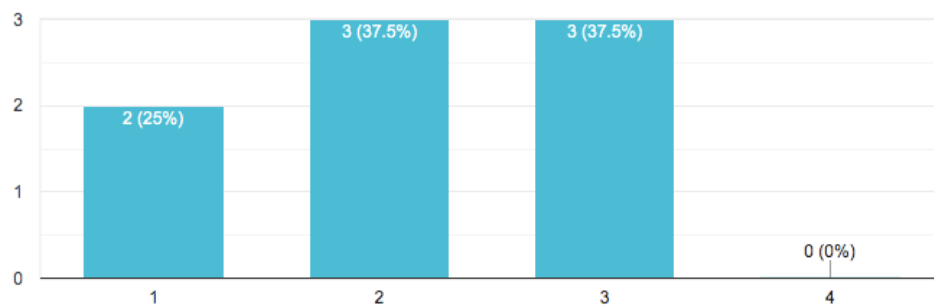
Determining if the development will offer advantage / disadvantages to NPU-L

8 responses



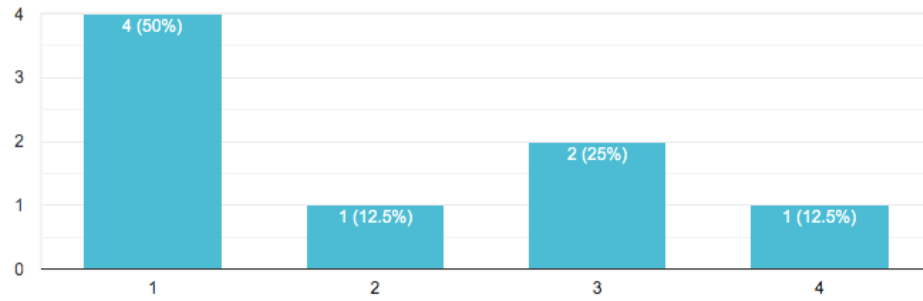
Determining the positive / negative impact this development will have on NPU-L

8 responses



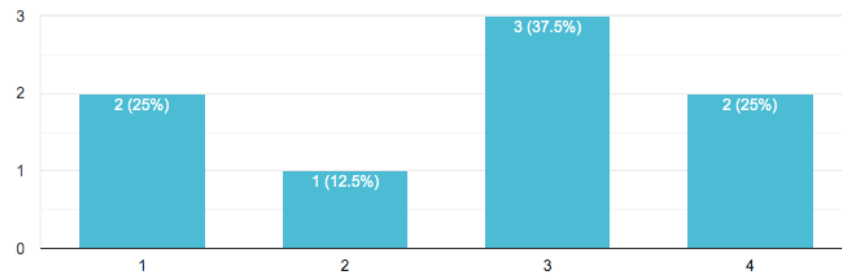
Deciding on whether to support / not support the proposed development

8 responses



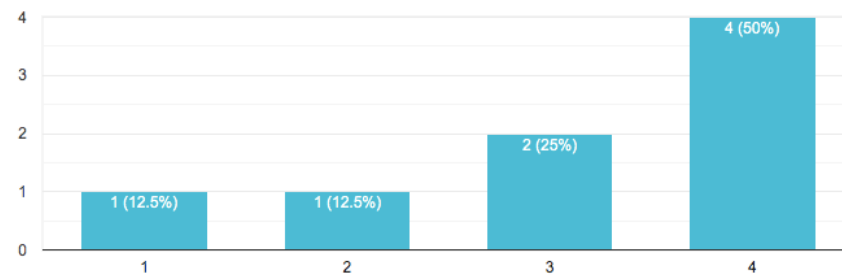
How satisfied are you overall with using this mapping prototype?

8 responses



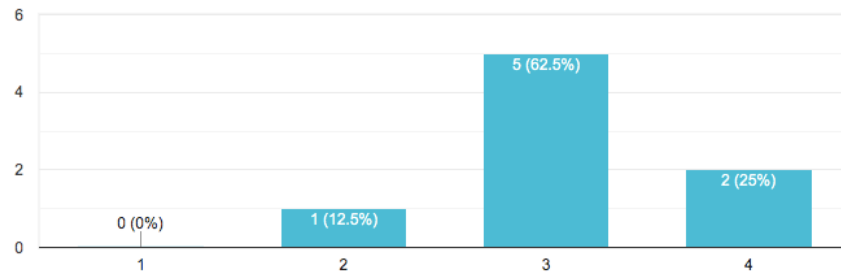
How satisfied are you with the look and style of the mapping prototype?

8 responses



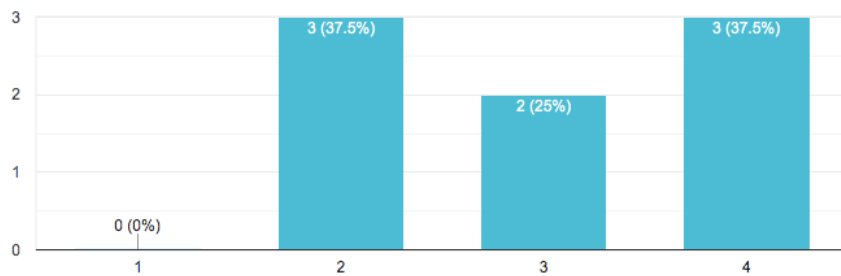
How satisfied are you with the clarity of the information provided in the map?

8 responses



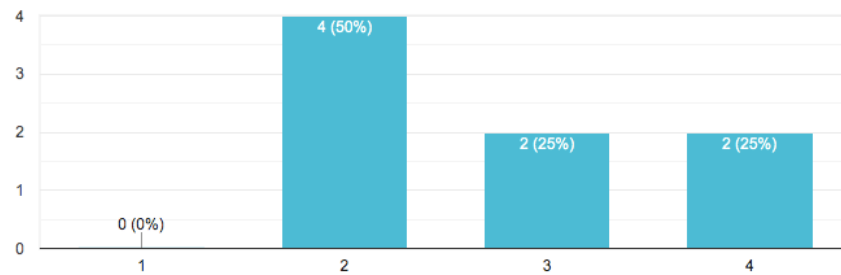
How satisfied are you with the clarity of the information provided in the instruction?

8 responses



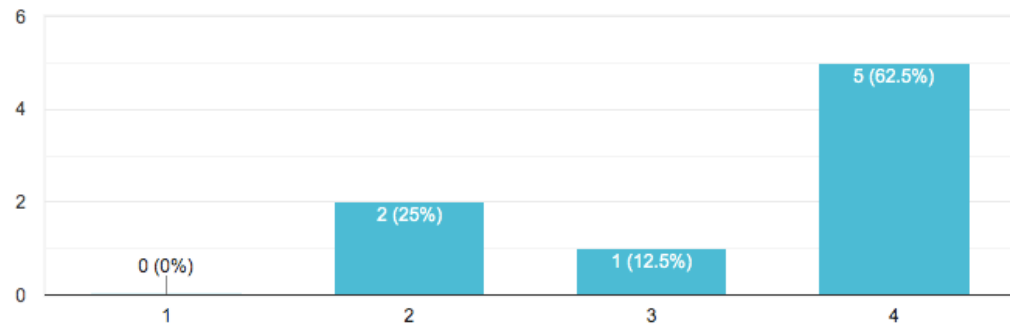
How satisfied are you with the clarity of the information provided in the checklist?

8 responses



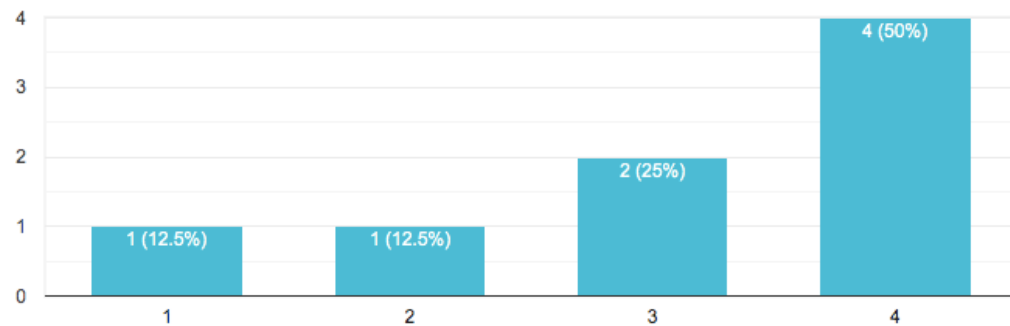
The information provided by this prototype is relevant to my residence in NPU-L

8 responses



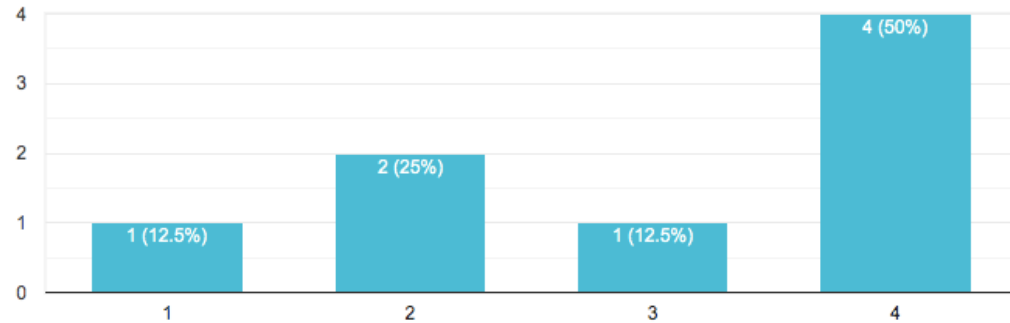
The information provided by this prototype helps me feel more included in community decision-making

8 responses



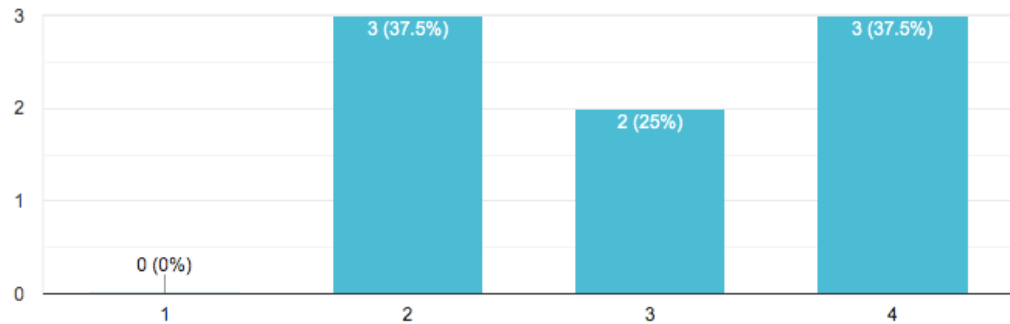
The information provided by this prototype helps me feel more informed in community decision-making

8 responses



The information provided by this prototype would help me during presentations with developers

8 responses



Is there anything you feel should be included or improved on the prototype?

3 responses

unmarked green space, flood prone legend, maybe add a couple of landmarks for easy reference? maybe have people note commute route and method. Bigger, higher contrast (look @ ADA guidelines)

checklist - with regard to the plan, retail development is not listed or discussed and should be included.
Implications: residents will not have info or tools that enable them to make decision that build healthy sustainable community

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